poems
1899-1905

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THE SECRET ROSE

THE CELTIC TWILIGHT

POEMS

THE WIND AMONG THE REEDS

THE SHADOWY WATERS (*First Version*)

IDEAS OF GOOD AND EVIL

PLAYS FOR AN IRISH THEATRE—

VOL. I. WHERE THERE IS NOTHING

VOL. II. SHORTER PLAYS

VOL. III. THE KING'S THRESHOLD, AND ON BAILE'S STRAND (*First Versions*)

Poems, 1899–1905

Poems, 1899–1905

By W. B. Yeats

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	xi
THE SHADOWY WATERS	1
ON BAILE'S STRAND	69
IN THE SEVEN WOODS	139
In the Seven Woods	141
The Old Age of Queen Maeve	142
Baile and Aillinn	151
The Arrow	163
The Folly of being Comforted	164
Old Memory	165
Never Give all the Heart	166
The Withering of the Boughs	167
Adam's Curse	170
The Song of Red Hanrahan	173
The Old Men admiring themselves in the Water	175
Under the Moon	176
The Players ask for a Blessing on the Psalteries and themselves	178
The Happy Townland	180
The Entrance of Deirdre	184
THE KING'S THRESHOLD	187
NOTES	271

PREFACE

I HAVE gathered into this book all the poems I have finished since I published "The Wind Among the Reeds" nearly seven years ago, and as I turn over the pages it seems to me very little to have been so long about. The writing of them has kept me pretty busy for all that, because I have had to destroy so many lines that would have thrown one play or another out of shape. During these years, especially during the last three or four, I have been getting some practical knowledge of the stage in our Irish dramatic movement, and I have spent a good part of the time shaping and reshaping some half-dozen plays in prose or verse. After I had learned to hold an audience for an act in prose I found that I had everything to learn over again in verse, for in dramatic prose one has to prepare principally for actions, and for the thoughts or emotions that bring them about or arise out of them; but in verse one has to do all this and to follow as well a more subtle sequence of cause and effect, that moves through vast

sentiments and intricate thoughts that accompany action, but are not necessary to it. It is not very difficult to construct a fairly vigorous prose play, and then, when one is certain it will act, as it stands, to decorate it and encumber it with poetry. But a play of that kind will never move us poetically, because it does not uncover, as it were, that high, intellectual, delicately organized soul of men and of an action, that may not speak aloud if it do not speak in verse. I am a little disappointed with the upshot of so many years, but I know that I have been busy with the Great Work, no lesser thing than that, although it may be the Athanor has burned too fiercely, or too faintly and fitfully, or that the *prima materia* has been ill-chosen.

Some of my friends, and it is always for a few friends one writes, do not understand why I have not been content with lyric writing. But one can only do what one wants to do, and to me drama—and I think it has been the same with other writers—has been the search for more of manful energy, more of cheerful acceptance of whatever arises out of the logic of events, and for clean outline, instead of those outlines of lyric poetry that are blurred with desire and vague regret. All art is in the last analysis an endeavour to condense as out of the flying vapour of

the world an image of human perfection, and for its own and not for the art's sake, and that is why the labour of the alchemists, who were called artists in their day, is a befitting comparison for all deliberate change of style. We live with images, that is our renunciation, for only the silent sage or saint can make himself into that perfection, turning the life inward at the tongue as though it heard the cry *Secretum meum mihi;* choosing not, as we do, to say all and know nothing, but to know all and to say nothing.

"The Shadowy Waters," "The King's Threshold," and "On Baile's Strand" are not at all as they were when first printed, for they have been rewritten and rewritten until I feel I can do no better with my present subjects and experience. I am the least confident about "The Shadowy Waters," for it is so unlike what it was when last played that it is a new play, and I have but tried it at rehearsal, and without its scenery and its costumes, and that harp which is to burn with a faint fire. It is to be judged, like all my plays, as part of an attempt to create a national dramatic literature in Ireland, and it takes upon itself its true likeness of a Jack-a-Lantern among more natural and simple things, when set among the plays of my fellow-workers. What I have done is but a form and colour in an

elaborate composition, where they have painted the other forms and colours. The extravagance, the joyous irony, the far-flying phantasy, the aristocratic gaiety, the resounding and rushing words of the comedy of the countryside, of the folk as we say, is akin to the elevation of poetry, which can but shrink even to the world's edge from the harsh, cunning, traditionless humour of the towns. I write of the tragic stories told over the fire by people who are in the comedies of my friends, and I never see my work played with theirs that I do not feel that my tragedy heightens their comedy and tragi-comedy, and grows itself more moving and intelligible from being mixed into the circumstance of the world by the circumstantial art of comedy. Nor is it only the stories and the country mind that have made us one school, for we have talked over one another's work so many times, that when a play of mine comes into my memory I cannot always tell how much even of the radical structure I may not owe to the writer of "The Lost Saint," or of "The Shadow of the Glen," or more than all, to the writer of "Hyacinth Halvey"; or that I would have written at all in so heady a mood if I did not know that one or the other were at hand to throw a bushel of laughter into the common basket.

PREFACE

I have printed the plays and poems in the order of their first publication, but so far as the actual writing of verse is concerned, "The Shadowy Waters" and "On Baile's Strand" have been so much rewritten that they are later than "The King's Threshold." I have put no explanatory notes to the poems and very few to the plays, for impatient readers do not read even the shortest notes, and the patient would cry out upon an arid summary, for they can read the legends in those strange and beautiful books, canonical with most of us in Ireland now, Lady Gregory's "Gods and Fighting Men" and "Cuchulain of Muirthemne."

W. B. YEATS.

IN THE SEVEN WOODS,
18 MAY, 1906.

THE SHADOWY WATERS

TO LADY GREGORY

I WALKED among the seven woods of Coole,
Shan-walla, where a willow-bordered pond
Gathers the wild duck from the winter dawn;
Shady Kyle-dortha; sunnier Kyle-na-gno,
Where many hundred squirrels are as happy
As though they had been hidden by green boughs,
Where old age cannot find them; Pairc-na-lea,
Where hazel and ash and privet blind the paths;
Dim Pairc-na-carraig, where the wild bees fling
Their sudden fragrances on the green air;
Dim Pairc-na-tarav, where enchanted eyes
Have seen immortal, mild, proud shadows walk;
Dim Inchy wood, that hides badger and fox
And marten-cat, and borders that old wood
Wise Biddy Early called the wicked wood:
Seven odours, seven murmurs, seven woods.
I had not eyes like those enchanted eyes,
Yet dreamed that beings happier than men
Moved round me in the shadows, and at night
My dreams were cloven by voices and by fires;

And the images I have woven in this story
Of Forgael and Dectora and the empty waters
Moved round me in the voices and the fires,
And more I may not write of, for they that cleave
The waters of sleep can make a chattering tongue
Heavy like stone, their wisdom being half silence.

How shall I name you, immortal, mild, proud shadows?
I only know that all we know comes from you,
And that you come from Eden on flying feet.
Is Eden far away, or do you hide
From human thought, as hares and mice and coneys
That run before the reaping-hook and lie
In the last ridge of the barley? Do our woods
And winds and ponds cover more quiet woods,
More shining winds, more star-glimmering ponds?
Is Eden out of time and out of space?
And do you gather about us when pale light
Shining on water and fallen among leaves,

And winds blowing from flowers, and whirr of feathers
And the green quiet, have uplifted the heart?

I have made this poem for you, that men may read it
Before they read of Forgael and Dectora,
As men in the old times, before the harps began,
Poured out wine for the high invisible ones.

September, 1900

THE HARP OF AENGUS

EDAIN came out of Midher's hill, and lay
Beside young Aengus in his tower of glass,
Where time is drowned in odour-laden winds
And druid moons, and murmuring of boughs,
And sleepy boughs, and boughs where apples made
Of opal and ruby and pale chrysolite
Awake unsleeping fires; and wove seven strings,
Sweet with all music, out of his long hair,
Because her hands had been made wild by love;
When Midher's wife had changed her to a fly,
He made a harp with druid apple wood
That she among her winds might know he wept;
And from that hour he has watched over none
But faithful lovers.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

FORGAEL

AIBRIC

DECTORA

SAILORS

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THE SHADOWY WATERS

SCENE. *The deck of an ancient ship. At the right of the stage is the mast, with a large square sail hiding a great deal of the sky and sea on that side. The tiller is at the left of the stage; it is a long oar coming through an opening in the bulwark. The deck rises in a series of steps behind the tiller, and the stern of the ship curves overhead. All the woodwork is of dark green; and the sail is dark green, with a blue pattern upon it, having a little copper colour here and there. The sky and sea are dark blue. All the persons of the play are dressed in various tints of green and blue, the men with helmets and swords of copper, the woman with copper ornaments upon her dress. When the play opens there are four persons upon the deck.* AIBRIC *stands by the tiller.* FORGAEL *sleeps upon the raised portion of the deck towards the front of the stage. Two sailors are standing near to the mast on which a harp is hanging.*

1ST SAILOR.

Has he not led us into these waste seas
For long enough?

2ND SAILOR.

Aye, long and long enough.

1ST SAILOR.

We have not come upon a shore or ship
These dozen weeks.

2ND SAILOR.

And I had thought to make
A good round sum upon this cruise, and turn—
For I am getting on in life—to something
That has less ups and downs than robbery.

1ST SAILOR.

I am so lecherous with abstinence,
I'd give the profit of nine voyages
For that red Moll that had but the one eye.

2ND SAILOR.

And all the ale ran out at the new moon;
And now that time puts water in my blood,
The ale cup is my father and my mother.

IST SAILOR.

It would be better to turn home again,
Whether he will or no; and better still
To make an end while he is sleeping there.
If we were of one mind I'd do it.

2ND SAILOR.

Were't not
That there is magic in that harp of his,
That makes me fear to raise a hand against him,
I would be of your mind; but when he plays it
Strange creatures flutter up before one's eyes,
Or cry about one's ears.

IST SAILOR.

Nothing to fear.

2ND SAILOR.

Do you remember when we sank that galley
At the full moon?

1ST SAILOR.

He played all through the night.

2ND SAILOR.

Until the moon had set; and when I looked
Where the dead drifted, I could see a bird
Like a grey gull upon the breast of each.
While I was looking they rose hurriedly,
And after circling with strange cries awhile
Flew westward; and many a time since then
I've heard a rustling overhead in the wind.

1ST SAILOR.

I saw them on that night as well as you.
But when I had eaten and drunk a bellyful
My courage came again.

2ND SAILOR.

But that's not all.

The other night, while he was playing it,
A beautiful young man and girl came up
In a white, breaking wave; they had the look
Of those that are alive for ever and ever.

IST SAILOR.

I saw them, too, one night. Forgael was playing,
And they were listening there beyond the sail.
He could not see them, but I held out my hands
To grasp the woman.

2ND SAILOR.

You have dared to touch her?

IST SAILOR.

O, she was but a shadow, and slipped from me.

2ND SAILOR.

But were you not afraid?

1ST SAILOR.

Why should I fear?

2ND SAILOR.

'Twas Aengus and Edain, the wandering lovers,
To whom all lovers pray.

1ST SAILOR.

But what of that?
A shadow does not carry sword or spear.

2ND SAILOR.

My mother told me that there is not one
Of the ever-living half so dangerous
As that wild Aengus. Long before her day
He carried Edain off from a king's house,
And hid her among fruits of jewel-stone
And in a tower of glass, and from that day
Has hated every man that's not in love,
And has been dangerous to him.

1ST SAILOR.

I have heard
He does not hate seafarers as he hates
Peaceable men that shut the wind away,
And keep to the one weary marriage bed.

2ND SAILOR.

I think that he has Forgael in his net,
And drags him through the sea.

1ST SAILOR.

Well, net or none
I'd kill him while we have the chance to do it.

2ND SAILOR.

It's certain I'd sleep easier o' nights
If he were dead; but who will be our captain,
Judge of the stars, and find a course for us?

1ST SAILOR.

I've thought of that. We must have Aibric with us,
For he can judge the stars as well as Forgael.

[*Going towards* AIBRIC.]

Become our captain, Aibric. I am resolved
To make an end of Forgael while he sleeps.
There's not a man but will be glad of it
When it is over, nor one to grumble at us.
You'll have the captain's share of everything.

AIBRIC.

Silence! for you have taken Forgael's pay.

IST SAILOR.

We joined him for his pay, but have had none
This long while now; we had not turned against him
If he had brought us among peopled seas,
For that was in the bargain when we struck it.
What good is there in this hard way of living,
Unless we drain more flagons in a year
And kiss more lips than lasting peaceable men
In their long lives? If you'll be of our troop
You'll be as good a leader.

AIBRIC.

Be of your troop!
No, nor with a hundred men like you
When Forgael's in the other scale. I'd say it
Even if Forgael had not been my master
From earliest childhood, but that being so,
If you will draw that sword out of its scabbard
I'll give my answer.

1ST SAILOR.

You have awaked him.
[*To* 2ND SAILOR.]
We'd better go, for we have lost this chance.
[*They go out to* R.

FORGAEL.

Have the birds passed us? I could hear your voice.
But there were others.

AIBRIC.

I have seen nothing pass.

FORGAEL.

You're certain of it? I never wake from sleep
But that I am afraid they may have passed,
For they're my only pilots. If I lost them
Straying too far into the north or south,
I'd never come upon the happiness
That has been promised me. I have not seen them
These many days; and yet there must be many
Dying at every moment in the world,
And flying towards their peace.

AIBRIC.

Put by these thoughts,
And listen to me for a while. The sailors
Are plotting for your death.

FORGAEL.

Have I not given
More riches than they ever hoped to find?

And now they will not follow, while I seek
The only riches that have hit my fancy.

AIBRIC.

What riches can you find in this waste sea
Where no ship sails, where nothing that's alive
Has ever come but those man-headed birds,
Knowing it for the world's end?

FORGAEL.

Where the world ends
The mind is made unchanging, for it finds
Miracle, ecstasy, the impossible hope,
The flagstone under all, the fire of fires,
The roots of the world.

AIBRIC.

Who knows that shadows
May not have driven you mad for their own sport?

FORGAEL.

Do you, too, doubt me? Have you joined their plot?

AIBRIC.

No, no, do not say that. You know right well
That I will never lift a hand against you.

FORGAEL.

Why should you be more faithful than the rest,
Being as doubtful?

AIBRIC.

I have called you master
Too many years to lift a hand against you.

FORGAEL.

Maybe it is but natural to doubt me.
You've never known, I'd lay a wager on it,
A melancholy that a cup of wine,
A lucky battle, or a woman's kiss
Could not amend.

AIBRIC.

I have good spirits enough.
I've nothing to complain of but heartburn,
And that is cured by a boiled liquorice root.

FORGAEL.

If you will give me all your mind awhile—
All, all, the very bottom of the bowl—
I'll show you that I am made differently,
That nothing can amend it but these waters,
Where I am rid of life—the events of the world—
What do you call it?—that old promise-breaker,
The cozening fortune-teller that comes whispering,
"You will have all you have wished for when you have earned
Land for your children or money in a pot."
And when we have it we are no happier,
Because of that old draught under the door,
Or creaky shoes. And at the end of all

We have been no better off than Seaghan the fool,
That never did a hand's turn. Aibric! Aibric!
We have fallen in the dreams the ever-living
Breathe on the burnished mirror of the world,
And then smooth out with ivory hands and sigh,
And find their laughter sweeter to the taste
For that brief sighing.

AIBRIC.

If you had loved some woman——

FORGAEL.

You say that also? You have heard the voices,
For that is what they say—all, all the shadows—
Aengus and Edain, those passionate wanderers,
And all the others; but it must be love
As they have known it. Now the secret's out;
For it is love that I am seeking for,
But of a beautiful, unheard-of kind
That is not in the world.

AIBRIC.

And yet the world
Has beautiful women to please every man.

FORGAEL.

But he that gets their love after the fashion
Loves in brief longing and deceiving hope
And bodily tenderness, and finds that even
The bed of love, that in the imagination
Had seemed to be the giver of all peace,
Is no more than a wine cup in the tasting,
And as soon finished.

AIBRIC.

All that ever loved
Have loved that way—there is no other way.

FORGAEL.

Yet never have two lovers kissed but they
Believed there was some other near at hand,
And almost wept because they could not find it.

AIBRIC.

When they have twenty years; in middle life
They take a kiss for what a kiss is worth,
And let the dream go by.

FORGAEL.

It's not a dream,
But the reality that makes our passion
As a lamp shadow—no—no lamp, the sun.
What the world's million lips are thirsting for,
Must be substantial somewhere.

AIBRIC.

I have heard the Druids
Mutter such things as they awake from trance.
It may be that the ever-living know it—
No mortal can.

FORGAEL.

Yes; if they give us help.

AIBRIC.

They are besotting you as they besot
The crazy herdsman that will tell his fellows
That he has been all night upon the hills,
Riding to hurley, or in the battle-host
With the ever-living.

FORGAEL.

What if he speak the truth,
And for a dozen hours have been a part
Of that more powerful life?

AIBRIC.

His wife knows better.
Has she not seen him lying like a log,
Or fumbling in a dream about the house?
And if she hear him mutter of wild riders,
She knows that it was but the cart-horse coughing
That set him to the fancy.

FORGAEL.

All would be well
Could we but give us wholly to the dreams,
And get into their world that to the sense
Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly
Among substantial things; for it is dreams
That lift us to the flowing, changing world
That the heart longs for. What is love itself,
Even though it be the lightest of light love,
But dreams that hurry from beyond the world
To make low laughter more than meat and drink,
Though it but set us sighing. Fellow wanderer
Could we but mix ourselves into a dream,
Not in its image on the mirror.

AIBRIC.

While
We're in the body that's impossible.

FORGAEL.

And yet I cannot think they're leading me
To death; for they that promised to me love
As those that can outlive the moon have known it,
Had the world's total life gathered up, it seemed,
Into their shining limbs—I've had great teachers.
Aengus and Edain ran up out of the wave—
You'd never doubt that it was life they promised
Had you looked on them face to face as I did,
With so red lips, and running on such feet,
And having such wide-open, shining eyes.

AIBRIC.

It's certain they are leading you to death.
None but the dead, or those that never lived,
Can know that ecstasy. Forgael! Forgael!
They have bade you follow the man-headed birds,
And you have told me that their journey lies
Towards the country of the dead.

FORGAEL.

What matter
If I am going to my death, for there,
Or somewhere, I shall find the love they have promised.
That much is certain. I shall find a woman
One of the ever-living, as I think—
One of the laughing people—and she and I
Shall light upon a place in the world's core
Where passion grows to be a changeless thing,
Like charmed apples made of chrysoprase,
Or chrysoberyl, or beryl, or chrysolite;
And there, in juggleries of sight and sense,
Become one movement, energy, delight,
Until the overburthened moon is dead.

[*A number of* SAILORS *enter hurriedly.*

IST SAILOR.

Look there! there in the mist! a ship of spice!
And we are almost on her!

2ND SAILOR.

We had not known
But for the ambergris and sandalwood.

IST SAILOR.

No; but opoponax and cinnamon.

FORGAEL.

[*Taking the tiller from* AIBRIC.]

The ever-living have kept my bargain for me,
And paid you on the nail.

AIBRIC.

Take up that rope
To make her fast while we are plundering her.

IST SAILOR.

There is a king and queen upon her deck,
And where there is one woman there'll be others.

AIBRIC.

Speak lower, or they'll hear.

IST SAILOR.

They cannot hear;
They are too busy with each other. Look!
He has stooped down and kissed her on the lips.

2ND SAILOR.

When she finds out we have better men aboard
She may not be too sorry in the end.

IST SAILOR.

She will be like a wild cat; for these queens
Care more about the kegs of silver and gold,
And the high fame that come to them in marriage,
Than a strong body and a ready hand.

IST SAILOR.

There's nobody is natural but a robber,
And that is why the world totters about
Upon its bandy legs.

AIBRIC.

Run at them now,
And overpower the crew while yet asleep!

[SAILORS *go out. Voices and the clashing of swords are heard from the other ship, which cannot be seen because of the sail.*

A VOICE.

Armed men have come upon us! O, I am slain!

ANOTHER VOICE.

Wake all below!

ANOTHER VOICE.

Why have you broken our sleep?

IST VOICE.

Armed men have come upon us! O, I am slain!

FORGAEL.

[*Who has remained at the tiller.*]

There! there they come! Gull, gannet, or diver
But with a man's head, or a fair woman's,

They hover over the masthead awhile
To wait their friends; but when their friends have
come
They'll fly upon that secret way of theirs.
One—and one—a couple—five together.
And I will hear them talking in a minute.
Yes, voices! but I do not catch the words.
Now I can hear. There's one of them that says:
"How light we are, now we are changed to birds!"
Another answers: "Maybe we shall find
Our heart's desire now that we are so light."
And then one asks another how he died,
And says: "A sword blade pierced me in my sleep."
And now they all wheel suddenly and fly
To the other side, and higher in the air.
And now a laggard with a woman's head
Comes crying: "I have run upon the sword.
I have fled to my beloved in the air,
In the waste of the high air, that we may wander

Among the windy meadows of the dawn."
But why are they still waiting? why are they
Circling and circling over the masthead?
What power that is more mighty than desire
To hurry to their hidden happiness
Withholds them now? Have the ever-living ones
A meaning in that circling overhead?
But what's the meaning? [*He cries out.*] Why do
you linger there?
Why do you not run to your desire,
Now that you have happy winged bodies.
[*His voice sinks again.*]
Being too busy in the air and the high air,
They cannot hear my voice; but what's the meaning?

[*The* SAILORS *have returned.* DECTORA *is with them. She is dressed in pale green, with copper ornaments on her dress, and has a copper crown upon her head. Her hair is dull red.*

FORGAEL.

[*Turning and seeing her.*]

Why are you standing with your eyes upon me?
You are not the world's core. O no, no, no!
That cannot be the meaning of the birds.
You are not its core. My teeth are in the world,
But have not bitten yet.

DECTORA.

I am a queen,
And ask for satisfaction upon these
Who have slain my husband and laid hands upon me.
[*Breaking loose from the* SAILORS *who are holding her.*
Let go my hands.

FORGAEL.

Why do you cast a shadow?
Where do you come from? Who brought you to this place?
They would not send me one that casts a shadow.

DECTORA.

Would that the storm that overthrew my ships,
And drowned the treasures of nine conquered nations,
And blew me hither to my lasting sorrow,
Had drowned me also. But, being yet alive,
I ask a fitting punishment for all
That raised their hands against him.

FORGAEL.

There are some
That weigh and measure all in these waste seas—
They that have all the wisdom that's in life,
And all that prophesying images
Made of dim gold rave out in secret tombs;
They have it that the plans of kings and queens
Are dust on the moth's wing; that nothing matters
But laughter and tears—laughter, laughter, and tears;
That every man should carry his own soul
Upon his shoulders.

DECTORA.

You've nothing but wild words,
And I would know if you will give me vengeance.

FORGAEL.

When she finds out I will not let her go—
When she knows that.

DECTORA.

What is it that you are muttering—
That you'll not let me go? I am a queen.

FORGAEL.

Although you are more beautiful than any,
I almost long that it were possible;
But if I were to put you on that ship,
With sailors that were sworn to do your will,
And you had spread a sail for home, a wind
Would rise of a sudden, or a wave so huge,
It had washed among the stars and put them out,

And beat the bulwark of your ship on mine,
Until you stood before me on the deck—
As now.

DECTORA.

Does wandering in these desolate seas
And listening to the cry of wind and wave
Bring madness?

FORGAEL.

Queen, I am not mad.

DECTORA.

And yet you say the water and the wind
Would rise against me.

FORGAEL.

No, I am not mad—
If it be not that hearing messages
From lasting watchers, that outlive the moon,
At the most quiet midnight is to be stricken.

DECTORA.

And did those watchers bid you take me captive?

FORGAEL.

Both you and I are taken in the net.
It was their hands that plucked the winds awake
And blew you hither; and their mouths have promised
I shall have love in their immortal fashion.
They gave me that old harp of the nine spells
That is more mighty than the sun and moon,
Or than the shivering casting-net of the stars,
That none might take you from me.

DECTORA.

[*First trembling back from the mast where the harp is, and then laughing.*]

For a moment
Your raving of a message and a harp
More mighty than the stars half troubled me.

But all that's raving. Who is there can compel
The daughter and granddaughter of kings
To be his bedfellow?

FORGAEL.

Until your lips
Have called me their beloved, I'll not kiss them.

DECTORA.

My husband and my king died at my feet,
And yet you talk of love.

FORGAEL.

The movement of time
Is shaken in these seas, and what one does
One moment has no might upon the moment
That follows after.

DECTORA.

I understand you now.
You have a Druid craft, wicked sound
Wrung from the cold women of the sea—

A magic that can call a demon up,
Until my body give you kiss for kiss.

FORGAEL.

Your soul shall give the kiss.

DECTORA.

I am not afraid,
While there's a rope to run into a noose
Or wave to drown. But I have done with words,
And I would have you look into my face
And know that it is fearless.

FORGAEL.

Do what you will,
For neither I nor you can break a mesh
Of the great golden net that is about us.

DECTORA.

There's nothing in the world that's worth a fear.

[*She passes* FORGAEL *and stands for a moment looking into his face.*

I have good reason for that thought.

[*She runs suddenly on to the raised part of the poop.*

And now

I can put fear away as a queen should.

[*She mounts on to the bulwark and turns towards* FORGAEL.

Fool, fool! Although you have looked into my face
You did not see my purpose. I shall have gone
Before a hand can touch me.

FORGAEL.

[*Folding his arms.*]

My hands are still;
The ever-living hold us. Do what you will,
You cannot leap out of the golden net.

1ST SAILOR.

No need to drown, for, if you will pardon us

And measure out a course and bring us home,
We'll put this man to death.

DECTORA.

I promise it.

IST SAILOR.

There is none to take his side.

AIBRIC.

I am on his side.
I'll strike a blow for him to give him time
To cast his dreams away.

[AIBRIC *goes in front of* FORGAEL *with drawn sword.* FORGAEL *takes the harp.*

IST SAILOR.

No other'll do it.

[*The* SAILORS *throw* AIBRIC *on one side. He falls upon the deck* L. *They lift their swords to strike* FORGAEL, *who is about to play the harp. The stage begins to darken. The* SAILORS *hesitate in fear.*

2ND SAILOR.

He has put a sudden darkness over the moon.

DECTORA.

Nine swords with handles of rhinoceros horn
To him that strikes him first!

IST SAILOR.

I will strike him first.

[*He goes close up to* FORGAEL *with his sword lifted. The harp begins to give out a faint light. The scene has become so dark that there is little light but from the harp.*

IST SAILOR.

[*Shrinking back.*]

He has caught the crescent moon out of the sky,
And carries it between us.

2ND SAILOR.

Holy fire
Has come into the jewels of the harp
To burn us to the marrow if we strike.

DECTORA.

I'll give a golden galley full of fruit,
That has the heady flavour of new wine,
To him that wounds him to the death.

IST SAILOR.

I'll do it.
For all his spells will vanish when he dies,
Having their life in him.

2ND SAILOR.

Though it be the moon
That he is holding up between us there,
will strike at him.

THE OTHERS.

And I! And I! And I!

[FORGAEL *plays the harp.*]

IST SAILOR.

[*Falling into a dream suddenly.*]

But you were saying there is somebody
Upon that other ship we are to wake.
You did not know what brought him to his end,
But it was sudden.

2ND SAILOR.

You are in the right;
I had forgotten that we must go wake him.

DECTORA.

He has flung a Druid spell upon the air,
And set you dreaming.

2ND SAILOR.

How can we have a wake
When we have neither brown nor yellow ale?

IST SAILOR.

I saw a flagon of brown ale aboard her.

3RD SAILOR.

How can we raise the keen that do not know
What name to call him by?

IST SAILOR.

Come to his ship.
His name will come into our thoughts in a minute.
I know that he died a thousand years ago,
And has not yet been waked.

2ND SAILOR.

[*Beginning to keen.*]

Ohone! O! O! O!
The yew bough has been broken into two,
And all the birds are scattered.

ALL THE SAILORS.

O! O! O! O!

[*They go out keening.*]

DECTORA.

Protect me now, gods, that my people swear by.

[AIBRIC *has risen from the ground where he had fallen. He has begun looking for his sword as if in a dream.*

AIBRIC.

Where is my sword that fell out of my hand
When I first heard the news? Ah, there it is!

[*He goes dreamily towards the sword, but* DECTORA *runs at it and takes it up before he can reach it.*

AIBRIC.

[*Sleepily.*]

Queen, give it me.

DECTORA.

No, I have need of it.

AIBRIC.

Why do you need a sword? But you may keep it,
Now that he's dead I have no need of it,
For everything is gone.

A SAILOR.

[*Calling from the other ship.*]

Come hither, Aibric,
And tell me who it is that we are waking.

AIBRIC.

[*Half to* DECTORA, *half to himself.*]

What name had that dead king? Arthur of Britain?
No, no—not Arthur. I remember now.
It was golden-armed Iollan, and he died
Brokenhearted, having lost his queen
Through wicked spells. That is not all the tale,
For he was killed. O! O! O! O! O! O!
For golden-armed Iollan has been killed.

[*He goes out. While he has been speaking, and through part of what follows one hears the wailing of the* SAILORS *from the other ship.* DECTORA *stands with the sword lifted in front of* FORGAEL.

DECTORA.

I will end all your magic on the instant.

[*Her voice becomes dreamy, and she lowers the sword slowly, and finally lets it fall. She spreads out her hair. She takes off her crown and lays it upon the deck.*

This sword is to lie beside him in the grave.
It was in all his battles. I will spread my hair,
And wring my hands, and wail him bitterly,
For I have heard that he was proud and laughing,
Blue-eyed, and a quick runner on bare feet,
And that he died a thousand years ago.
O! O! O!

[FORGAEL *changes the tune.*]

But no, that is not it.
I knew him well, and while I heard him laughing
They killed him at my feet. O! O! O! O!
For golden-armed Iollan that I loved.
But what is it that made me say I loved him?
It was that harper put it in my thoughts,
But it is true. Why did they run upon him,
And beat the golden helmet with their swords?

FORGAEL.

Do you not know me, lady? I am he
That you are weeping for.

DECTORA.

No, for he is dead.
O! O! O! for golden-armed Iollan.

FORGAEL.

It was so given out, but I will prove
That the grave-diggers in a dreamy frenzy
Have buried nothing but my golden arms.

Listen to that low-laughing string of the moon
And you will recollect my face and voice,
For you have listened to me playing it
These thousand years.

[*He starts up, listening to the birds. The harp slips from his hands, and remains leaning against the bulwarks behind him. The light goes out of it.*

What are the birds at there?
Why are they all a-flutter of a sudden?
What are you calling out above the mast?
If railing and reproach and mockery
Because I have awakened her to love
My magic strings, I'll make this answer to it:
Being driven on by voices and by dreams
That were clear messages from the ever-living,
I have done right. What could I but obey?
And yet you make a clamour of reproach.

DECTORA.

[*Laughing.*]

Why, it's a wonder out of reckoning
That I should keen him from the full of the moon
To the horn, and he be hale and hearty.

FORGAEL.

How have I wronged her now that she is merry?
But no, no, no! your cry is not against me.
You know the councils of the ever-living,
And all that tossing of your wings is joy,
And all that murmuring is but a marriage song;
But if it be reproach, I answer this:
There is not one among you that made love
By any other means. You call it passion,
Consideration, generosity;
But it was all deceit, and flattery
To win a woman in her own despite,

For love is war, and there is hatred in it;
And if you say that she came willingly——

DECTORA.

Why do you turn away and hide your face,
That I would look upon for ever?

FORGAEL.

My grief.

DECTORA.

Have I not loved you for a thousand years?

FORGAEL.

I never have been golden-armed Iollan.

DECTORA.

I do not understand. I know your face
Better than my own hands.

FORGAEL.

I have deceived you
Out of all reckoning.

DECTORA.

Is it not true
That you were born a thousand years ago,
In islands where the children of Aengus wind
In happy dances under a windy moon,
And that you'll bring me there?

FORGAEL.

I have deceived you;
I have deceived you utterly.

DECTORA.

How can that be?
Is it that though your eyes are full of love
Some other woman has a claim on you,
And I've but half?

FORGAEL.

Oh, no!

DECTORA.

And if there is,
If there be half a hundred more, what matter?
I'll never give another thought to it;
No, no, nor half a thought; but do not speak.
Women are hard and proud and stubborn-hearted,
Their heads being turned with praise and flattery;
And that is why their lovers are afraid
To tell them a plain story.

FORGAEL.

That's not the story;
But I have done so great a wrong against you,
There is no measure that it would not burst.
I will confess it all.

DECTORA.

What do I care,
Now that my body has begun to dream,

And you have grown to be a burning sod
In the imagination and intellect?
If something that's most fabulous were true—
If you had taken me by magic spells,
And killed a lover or husband at my feet—
I would not let you speak, for I would know
That it was yesterday and not to-day
I loved him; I would cover up my ears,
As I am doing now. [*A pause.*] Why do you weep?

FORGAEL.

I weep because I've nothing for your eyes
But desolate waters and a battered ship.

DECTORA.

O, why do you not lift your eyes to mine?

FORGAEL.

I weep—I weep because bare night's above,
And not a roof of ivory and gold.

DECTORA.

I would grow jealous of the ivory roof,
And strike the golden pillars with my hands.
I would that there was nothing in the world
But my beloved—that night and day had perished,
And all that is and all that is to be,
All that is not the meeting of our lips.

FORGAEL.

I too, I too. Why do you look away?
Am I to fear the waves, or is the moon
My enemy?

DECTORA.

I looked upon the moon,
Longing to knead and pull it into shape
That I might lay it on your head as a crown.
But now it is your thoughts that wander away,
For you are looking at the sea. Do you not know

How great a wrong it is to let one's thought
Wander a moment when one is in love?

[*He has moved away. She follows him. He is looking out over the sea, shading his eyes.*

DECTORA.

Why are you looking at the sea?

FORGAEL

Look there!

DECTORA.

What is there but a troop of ash-grey birds
That fly into the west?

FORGAEL.

But listen, listen!

DECTORA.

What is there but the crying of the birds?

FORGAEL.

If you'll but listen closely to that crying
You'll hear them calling out to one another
With human voices.

DECTORA.

O, I can hear them now.
What are they? Unto what country do they fly?

FORGAEL.

To unimaginable happiness.
They have been circling over our heads in the air,
But now that they have taken to the road
We have to follow, for they are our pilots;
And though they're but the colour of grey ash,
They're crying out, could you but hear their words,
'There is a country at the end of the world
Where no child's born but to outlive the moon.'

[*The* SAILORS *come in with* AIBRIC. *They are in great excitement.*

1ST SAILOR.

The hold is full of treasure.

2ND SAILOR.

Full to the hatches.

1ST SAILOR.

Treasure and treasure.

3RD SAILOR.

Boxes of precious spice.

1ST SAILOR.

Ivory images with amethyst eyes.

3RD SAILOR.

Dragons with eyes of ruby.

1ST SAILOR.

The whole ship
Flashes as if it were a net of herrings.

3RD SAILOR.

Let's home; I'd give some rubies to a woman.

2ND SAILOR.

There's somebody I'd give the amethyst eyes to.

1ST SAILOR.

Let's home and spend it in our villages.

AIBRIC.

[*Silencing them with a gesture.*]

We would return to our own country, Forgael,
For we have found a treasure that's so great
Imagination cannot reckon it.
And having lit upon this woman here,
What more have you to look for on the seas?

FORGAEL.

I cannot—I am going on to the end.
As for this woman, I think she is coming with me.

AIBRIC.

The ever-living have made you mad; but no,
It was this woman in her woman's vengeance
That drove you to it, and I fool enough
To fancy that she'd bring you home again.
'Twas you that egged him to it, for you know
That he is being driven to his death.

DECTORA.

That is not true, for he has promised me
An unimaginable happiness.

AIBRIC.

And if that happiness be more than dreams,
More than the froth, the feather, the dust-whirl,
The crazy nothing that I think it is,
It shall be in the country of the dead,
If there be such a country.

DECTORA.

No, not there,
But in some island where the life of the world
Leaps upward, as if all the streams o' the world
Had run into one fountain.

AIBRIC.

Speak to him.
He knows that he is taking you to death;
He cannot contradict me.

DECTORA.

Is that true?

FORGAEL.

I do not know for certain, but I know
That I have the best of pilots.

AIBRIC.

Shadows, illusions,
That the shape-changers, the ever-laughing ones,

The immortal mockers have cast into his mind,
Or called before his eyes.

DECTORA.

O carry me
To some sure country, some familiar place.
Have we not everything that life can give
In having one another?

FORGAEL.

How could I rest
If I refused the messengers and pilots
With all those sights and all that crying out?

DECTORA.

But I will cover up your eyes and ears,
That you may never hear the cry of the birds,
Or look upon them.

FORGAEL.

Were they but lowlier
I'd do your will, but they are too high—too high.

DECTORA.

Being too high, their heady prophecies
But harry us with hopes that come to nothing,
Because we are not proud, imperishable,
Alone and winged.

FORGAEL.

Our love shall be like theirs
When we have put their changeless image on.

DECTORA.

I am a woman, I die at every breath.

AIBRIC.

Let the birds scatter for the tree is broken.
And there's no help in words. [*To the* SAILORS.] To
the other ship,
And I will follow you and cut the rope
When I have said farewell to this man here,
For neither I nor any living man
Will look upon his face again. [*The* SAILORS *go out.*

FORGAEL.

[*To* DECTORA.]

Go with him,

For he will shelter you and bring you home.

AIBRIC.

[*Taking* FORGAEL's *hand.*]

I'll do it for his sake.

DECTORA.

No. Take this sword

And cut the rope, for I go on with Forgael.

AIBRIC.

[*Half falling into the keen.*]

The yew bough has been broken into two,

And all the birds are scattered—O! O! O!

[*He goes out.*

Farewell! farewell!

DECTORA.

The sword is in the rope—
The rope's in two—it falls into the sea,
It whirls into the foam. O ancient worm,
Dragon that loved the world and held us to it,
You are broken, you are broken. The world drifts
away,
And I am left alone with my beloved,
Who cannot put me from his sight for ever.
We are alone for ever, and I laugh,
Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.
The mist has covered the heavens, and you and I
Shall be alone for ever. We two—this crown—
I half remember. It has been in my dreams.
Bend lower, O king, that I may crown you with it.
O flower of the branch, O bird among the leaves,
O silver fish that my two hands have taken
Out of the running stream, O morning star,

Trembling in the blue heavens like a white fawn
Upon the misty border of the wood,
Bend lower, that I may cover you with my hair,
For we will gaze upon this world no longer.

[*The scene darkens, and the harp once more begins to burn as with a faint fire.* FORGAEL *is kneeling at* DECTORA'S *feet.*

FORGAEL.

[*Gathering* DECTORA'S *hair about him.*]

Beloved, having dragged the net about us,
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal;
And that old harp awakens of itself
To cry aloud to the grey birds, and dreams,
That have had dreams for father, live in us.

ON BAILE'S STRAND

TO WILLIAM FAY

Because of the beautiful phantasy of his playing in the character of the Fool.

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

A FOOL

A BLIND MAN

CUCHULAIN, KING OF MUIRTHEMNE

CONCHUBAR, HIGH KING OF ULAD

A YOUNG MAN, SON OF CUCHULAIN

KINGS AND SINGING WOMEN

ON BAILE'S STRAND

SCENE. *A great hall at Dundealgan; not "Cuchulain's great ancient house," but an assembly house nearer to the sea. A big door at the back, and through the door misty light as of sea mist. There are many chairs on either side raised one above the other, tier above tier. One of these chairs, which is towards the front of the stage, is bigger than the others. An elaborate cloak lies on a chair at the other side. Somewhere at the back there is a table with flagons of ale upon it and drinking horns. There is a small door at one side of the hall. A* FOOL *and* BLIND MAN *come in through the door at the back. They wear patched and ragged clothes, and the* BLIND MAN *leans upon a staff.*

FOOL.

What a clever man you are, though you are blind! There's nobody with two eyes in his head that is as clever as you are. Who but you could have thought that the henwife sleeps every day a little at noon!

I would never be able to steal anything if you didn't tell me where to look for it. And what a good cook you are! You take the fowl out of my hands, after I have stolen it, and you pluck it, and put it into the big pot at the fire there, and I can go out and run races with the witches at the edge of the waves and get an appetite; and when I've got it, there's the hen waiting inside for me done to the turn!

BLIND MAN.

[*Who is feeling about with his stick.*]

Done to the turn.

FOOL.

[*Putting his arm round* BLIND MAN'S *neck.*]

Come now, I'll have a leg and you'll have a leg, and we'll draw lots for the wish-bone. I'll be praising you—I'll be praising you while we're eating it—for your good plans and for your good cooking. There's nobody in the world like you, Blind Man.

Come, come—wait a minute—I shouldn't have closed the door. There are some that look for me, and I wouldn't like them not to find me. Don't tell it to anybody, Blind Man. There are some that follow me: Bòann herself out of the river and Fand out of the deep sea—witches they are, and they come by in the wind and they cry, "Give a kiss, Fool, give a kiss!" That's what they cry. That's wide enough; all the witches can come in now. I wouldn't have them beat at the door and say, "Where is the Fool? Why has he put a lock on the door?" Maybe they'll hear the bubbling of a pot and come in and sit on the ground—but we won't give them any of the fowl—let them go back to the sea, let them go back to the sea.

BLIND MAN.

[*Feeling legs of big chair with his hands.*]

Ah! [*Then in a louder voice as he feels the back of it.*] Ah—ah—

FOOL.

Why do you say "ah—ah?"

BLIND MAN.

I know the big chair. It is to-day the High King Conchubar is coming. They have brought out his chair. He is going to be Cuchulain's master in earnest from this day out. It is that he's coming for.

FOOL.

He must be a great man to be Cuchulain's master.

BLIND MAN.

So he is. He is a great man. He is over all the rest of the kings of Ireland.

FOOL.

Cuchulain's master! I thought Cuchulain could do anything he liked.

BLIND MAN.

So he did, so he did; but he ran too wild, and Conchubar is coming to-day to put an oath upon

him that will stop his rambling and make him as biddable as a house dog and keep him always at his hand. He will sit in this chair and put the oath upon him. [*He sits in chair.*

FOOL.

How will he do that?

BLIND MAN.

You have no wits to understand such things. He will sit up in this chair, and he'll say, "Take the oath, Cuchulain; I bid you take the oath. Do as I tell you. What are your wits compared with mine? And what are your riches compared with mine? And what sons have you to pay your debts and to put a stone over you when you die? Take the oath, I tell you; take a strong oath."

FOOL.

[*Crumpling himself up and whining.*]

I will not—I'll take no oath—I want my dinner.

BLIND MAN.

Hush! hush! It is not done yet.

FOOL.

You said it was done to a turn.

BLIND MAN.

Did I, now! Well, it might be done and not done. The wings might be white, but the legs might be red; the flesh might stick hard to the bones and not come away in the teeth . . . but believe me, Fool, it will be well done before you put your teeth in it.

FOOL.

My teeth are growing long with the hunger.

BLIND MAN.

I'll tell you a story. The kings have story tellers while they are waiting for their dinner. I will tell you a story with a fight in it, a story with a

champion in it, and a ship and a queen's son that has his mind set on killing somebody that you and I know.

FOOL.

Who is that? Who is he coming to kill?

BLIND MAN.

Wait, now, till you hear. When you were stealing the fowl I was lying in a hole in the sand, and I heard three men coming with a shuffling sort of noise. They were wounded and groaning.

FOOL.

Go on, tell me about the fight.

BLIND MAN.

There had been a fight, a great fight, a tremendous great fight. A young man had landed on the shore, the guardians of the shore had asked his name and he had refused to tell it, and he had killed one and others had run away.

FOOL.

That's enough. Come on, now, to the fowl. I wish it was bigger. I wish it was as big as a goose.

BLIND MAN.

Hush! I haven't told you all. I know who that young man is. I heard the men who were running away say he had red hair, that he come from Aoife's country, that he was coming to kill Cuchulain.

FOOL.

Nobody could do that.

[*To a tune.*]

Cuchulain has killed kings,
Kings and sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water,
And witches out of the air,
Bocanachs and Bananachs and people of the woods.

BLIND MAN.

Hush! hush!

FOOL.

[*Still singing.*]

Witches that steal the milk,
Fomor that steal the children,
Hags that have heads like hares,
Hares that have claws like witches,
All riding a cock-horse

[*Spoken.*]

Out of the very bottom of the bitter black North.

BLIND MAN.

Hush, I say!

FOOL.

Does Cuchulain know that he is coming to kill him?

BLIND MAN.

How would he know that with his head in the clouds? He doesn't care for common fighting. Why would he put himself out, and nobody in it but that young man? Now, if it were a white fawn that might turn into a queen before morning.

FOOL.

Come to the fowl. I wish it was as big as a pig. A fowl with goose-grease and pig's crackling.

BLIND MAN.

No hurry, no hurry. I know whose son it is. I wouldn't tell anybody else, but I will tell you. A secret is better to you than your dinner. You like being told secrets.

FOOL.

Tell me the secret.

BLIND MAN.

That young man is Aoife's son. . . . I am sure it is Aoife's son; it is borne in upon me that it is Aoife's son. You have often heard me talking of Aoife, the great woman fighter Cuchulain got the mastery over in the North?

FOOL.

I know, I know. She is one of those cross queens that live in hungry Scotland.

BLIND MAN.

I am sure it is her son. I was in Aoife's country for a long time.

FOOL.

That was before you were blinded for putting a curse upon the wind.

BLIND MAN.

There was a boy in her house that had her own red colour on him, and everybody said he was to be brought up to kill Cuchulain, that she hated Cuchulain. She used to put a helmet on a pillar stone and call it Cuchulain and set him casting at it. . . . There is a step outside—Cuchulain's step.

[CUCHULAIN *passes by in the mist outside the big door.*

FOOL.

Where is Cuchulain going?

BLIND MAN.

He is going to meet Conchubar, that has bidden him to take the oath.

FOOL.

Ah! an oath, Blind Man. . . . How can I remember so many things at once? Who is going to take an oath?

BLIND MAN.

Cuchulain is going to take an oath to Conchubar, who is High King.

FOOL.

What a mix-up you make of everything, Blind Man! You were telling me one story, and now you are telling me another story. How can I understand things, when they begin to happen, if you mix up everything at the beginning?—Wait till I settle it out. [*Takes off shoes.*] There now, there's Cuchulain, and there is the young man that is coming to kill him, and Cuchulain doesn't know. But where's Conchubar? [*Takes bag from side.*] That's Conchubar with all his riches.—Cuchulain—Conchubar—the Young Man.—And

where's Aoife? [*Throws up cap.*] There is Aoife, high up on the mountains in high hungry Scotland. [*Begins putting on shoes.*] Maybe it's not true, after all. Maybe it was your own making up. It's many a time you cheated me before with your lies. Come to the cooking-pot, my stomach is pinched and rusty. Would you have it be creaking like a gate?

BLIND MAN.

I tell you it's true. And more than that is true. If you listen to what I say you'll forget your stomach.

FOOL.

I won't!

BLIND MAN.

Listen. I know who the young man's father is, but I won't say; I would be afraid to say. . . . Ah, Fool, you would forget everything if you could know who the young man's father is!

FOOL.

Who is it? Tell me now, quick, or I'll shake you. Come, out with it, or I'll shake you!

[*A murmur of voices in the distance.*

BLIND MAN.

Wait, wait; there's somebody coming. . . . It is Cuchulain is coming. He's coming back with the High King. Go and ask Cuchulain. He'll tell you. It's little you'll care about the cooking-pot when you have asked Cuchulain that.

[BLIND MAN *goes out by side door.*

FOOL.

I'll ask him. Cuchulain will know. He was in Aoife's country. [*Going towards door at back.*] I'll ask him. [*Turns and goes to door at side.*] But no, I won't ask him. I would be afraid. [*Going up towards door at back again.*] Yes, I will ask him. —What harm in asking?—The blind man said I was to ask him.—[*Going to door at side again.*]

No, no; I'll not ask him.—He might kill me.—I have but killed hens and geese and pigs. He has killed kings. [*Goes up again almost to door at back.*] Who says I'm afraid? I'm not afraid; I'm no coward. I'll ask him.—No, no, Cuchulain, I'm not going to ask you. [*Running to door at side.*]

He has killed kings,
Kings and the sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water,
And witches out of the air,
Bocanachs and Bananachs and people of the woods.

[*He runs out, the last words being heard outside.* CUCHULAIN *and* CONCHUBAR *enter through the big door at the back. While they are still outside* CUCHULAIN'S *voice is heard raised in anger. He is a dark man, something over forty years of age.* CONCHUBAR *is much older, though not feeble-looking.*

CUCHULAIN.

Because I have killed men without your bidding,
And have rewarded others at my own pleasure,
Because of half a score of trifling things,
You lay this oath upon me; and now—and now
You add another pebble to the heap,
And I must be your man, wellnigh your bondsman,
Because a youngster out of Aoife's country
Has found the shore ill guarded.

CONCHUBAR.

He came to land
While you were somewhere out of sight and hearing;
Hunting or dancing with your wild companions.

CUCHULAIN.

He can be driven out. I'll not be bound.
I'll dance or hunt, or quarrel or make love,
Wherever or whenever I've a mind to.
If time had not put water in your blood
You never would have thought it.

CONCHUBAR.

I would leave
A strong and settled country to my children.

CUCHULAIN.

And I must be obedient in all things:
Give up my will to yours, go where you please,
Come where you will, sit at the council-board
Among the unshapely bodies of old men!
I, whose mere name has kept this country safe,
I, that in early days have driven out
Maeve of Cruachan and the northern pirates,
The hundred kings of Sorcha and the kings
Out of the Garden in the East of the World!
Must I that held you on the throne, when all
Had pulled you from it, swear obedience
As if I were some cattle-raising king?
Are my shins speckled with the heat of the fire,
Or have my hands no skill but to make figures

Upon the ashes with a stick? Am I
So slack and idle that I need a whip
Before I serve you?

CONCHUBAR.

No, no whip, Cuchulain.
But every day my children come and say:
"This man is growing harder to endure.
How can we be at safety with this man,
That nobody can buy or bid or bind?
We shall be at his mercy when you are gone.
He burns the earth as if it were a fire,
And time can never touch him."

CUCHULAIN.

And so the tale
Grows finer yet, and I am to obey
Whatever child you set upon the throne
As if it were yourself!

CONCHUBAR.

Most certainly.
I am High King, my son shall be High King;
And you, for all the wildness of your blood,
And though your father came out of the sun,
Are but a little king, and weigh but light
In anything that touches government,
If put into the balance with my children.

CUCHULAIN.

It's well that we should speak our minds out plainly,
For when we die we shall be spoken of
In many countries. We in our young days
Have seen the heavens like a burning cloud
Brooding upon the world, and being more
Than men can be, now that cloud's lifted up,
We should be the more truthful, Conchubar.
I do not like your children. They have no pith,
No marrow in their bones, and will lie soft
Where you and I lie hard.

CONCHUBAR.

You rail at them
Because you have no children of your own.

CUCHULAIN.

I think myself most lucky that I leave
No pallid ghost or mockery of a man
To drift and mutter in the corridors
Where I have laughed and sung.

CONCHUBAR.

That is not true,
For all your boasting of the truth between us,
For there is none that having house and lands,
That have been in the one family,
And called by the one name for centuries,
But is made miserable if he know
They are to pass into a stranger's keeping,
As yours will pass.

CUCHULAIN.

The most of men feel that;
But you and I leave names upon the harp.

CONCHUBAR.

You play with arguments as lawyers do,
And put no heart in them. I know your thoughts,
For we have slept under the one cloak and drunk
From the one wine cup. I know you to the bone.
I have heard you cry—aye, in your very sleep—
"I have no son!" and with such bitterness
That I have gone upon my knees and prayed
That it might be amended.

CUCHULAIN.

For you thought
That I should be as biddable as others
Had I their reason for it; but that's not true,
For I would need a weightier argument

Than one that marred me in the copying,
As I have that clean hawk out of the air,
That as men say begot this body of mine
Upon a mortal woman.

CONCHUBAR.

Now as ever
You mock at every measurable hope,
And would have nothing or impossible things.
What eye has ever looked upon the child
Would satisfy a mind like that!

CUCHULAIN.

I would leave
My house and name to none that would not face
Even myself in battle.

CONCHUBAR.

Being swift of foot,
And making light of every common chance,
You should have overtaken on the hills

Some daughter of the air, or on the shore
A daughter of the Country-under-Wave.

CUCHULAIN.

I am not blasphemous.

CONCHUBAR.

Yet you despise
Our queens, and would not call a child your own
If one of them had borne him.

CUCHULAIN.

I have not said it.

CONCHUBAR.

Ah, I remember I have heard you boast,
When the ale was in your blood, that there was one
In Scotland, where you had learned the trade of war,
That had a stone-pale cheek and red-brown hair,
And that although you had loved other women,

You'd sooner that fierce woman of the camp
Bore you a son than any queen among them.

CUCHULAIN.

You call her a fierce woman of the camp;
But having lived among the spinning-wheels,
You'd have no woman near that would not say,
"Ah, how wise!" "What will you have for supper?"
"What shall I wear that I may please you, sir?"
And keep that humming through the day and night
Forever. A fierce woman of the camp!—
But I am getting angry about nothing.
You have never seen her. Ah, Conchubar, had you
seen her,
With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers
Thrown backward, and the bow-string at her ear,
Or sitting at the fire with those grave eyes
Full of good counsel as it were with wine,
Or when love ran through all the lineaments

Of her wild body—although she had no child,
None other had all beauty, queen or lover,
Or was so fitted to give birth to kings.

CONCHUBAR.

There's nothing I can say but drifts you farther
From the one weighty matter. That very woman—
For I know well that you are praising Aoife—
Now hates you, and will leave no subtilty
Unknotted that might run into a noose
About your throat, no army in idleness
That might bring ruin on this land you serve.

CUCHULAIN.

No wonder in that—no wonder at all in that.
I never have known love but as a kiss
In the mid-battle, and a difficult truce
Of oil and water, candles and dark night,
Hillside and hollow, the hot-footed sun,
And the cold sliding, slippery-footed moon—

A brief forgiveness between opposites
That have been hatreds for three times the age
Of this long-'stablished ground.

CONCHUBAR.

Listen to me:
Aoife makes war on us, and every day
Our enemies grow greater and beat the walls
More bitterly, and you within the walls
Are every day more turbulent; and yet
When I would speak about these things, your mind
Runs as it were a swallow on the wind.
Look at the door, and what men gather there—
Old counsellors that steer the land with me
And younger kings, the dancers and harp-players
That follow in your tumults, and all these
Are held there by the one anxiety.
Will you be bound into obedience,
And so make this land safe for them and theirs?

You are but half a king, and I but half.
I need your might of hand and burning heart,
And you my wisdom.

[*Outside the door in the blue light of the sea mist are many old and young kings; amongst them are three women, two of whom carry a bowl full of fire. The third woman puts from time to time fragrant herbs into the fire so that it flickers up into brighter flame.*

CUCHULAIN.

[*Going near to the door.*]

Nestlings of a high nest,
Hawks that have followed me into the air
And looked upon the sun, we'll out of this
And sail upon the wind once more. This king
Would have me take an oath to do his will,
And having listened to his tune from morning,

I will no more of it. Run to the stable
And set the horses to the chariot-pole,
And send a messenger to the harp-players.
We'll find a level place among the woods
And dance awhile.

A YOUNG KING.

Cuchulain, take the oath.
There is none here that would not have you take it.

CUCHULAIN.

You'd have me take it? Are you of one mind?

THE KINGS.

All, all, all, all!

A KING.

Do what the High King bids you.

CONCHUBAR.

There is not one but dreads this turbulence,
Now that they are settled men.

CUCHULAIN.

Are you so changed,
Or have I grown more dangerous of late?
But that's not it. I understand it all.
It's you that have changed. You've wives and children now,
And for that reason cannot follow one
That lives like a bird's flight from tree to tree.—
It's time the years put water in my blood
And drowned the wildness of it, for all's changed,
But that unchanged.—I'll take what oath you will:
The moon, the sun, the water, light, or air,
I do not care how binding.

CONCHUBAR.

[*Who has seated himself in his great chair.*]

On this fire
That has been lighted from your hearth and mine,
The older men shall be my witnesses,

14763

The younger yours. The holders of the fire
Shall purify the thresholds of the house
With waving fire, and shut the outer door,
According to old custom, and sing rhyme
That has come down from the old law-makers
To blow the witches out. Considering
That the wild will of man could by oath be bound,
But that a woman's could not, they bid us sing
Against the will of woman at its wildest
In the shape-changers that run upon the wind.

[*The song of the* WOMEN.]

May this fire have driven out
The shape-changers that can put
Ruin on a great king's house
Until all be ruinous.
Names whereby a man has known
The threshold and the hearthstone,
Gather on the wind and drive

ON BAILE'S STRAND

Women none can kiss and thrive,
For they are but whirling wind,
Out of memory and mind.
They would make a prince decay
With light images of clay
Planted in the running wave;
Or, for many shapes they have,
They would change them into hounds
Until he had died of his wounds,
Though the change were but a whim;
Or they'd hurl a spell at him,
That he follow with desire
Bodies that can never tire
Or grow kind, for they anoint
All their bodies joint by joint
With a miracle-working juice
That is made out of the grease
Of the ungoverned unicorn;
But the man is thrice forlorn,

Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost,
That they follow, for at most
They will give him kiss for kiss
While they murmur, "After this
Hatred may be sweet to the taste";
Those wild hands that have embraced
All his body can but shove
At the burning wheel of love
Till the side of hate comes up.
Therefore in this ancient cup
May the sword-blades drink their fill
Of the home-brew there, until
They will have for master none
But the threshold and hearthstone.

[*After* "Memory and mind" *their words die away to a murmur, but are loud again at* "Therefore in." *The others do not speak when these words are loud.*

CUCHULAIN.

[*Speaking while they are singing.*]

I'll take and keep this oath, and from this day
I shall be what you please, my nestlings.
Yet I had thought you one of those that praised
Whatever life could make the pulse run quickly,
Even though it were brief, and though you held
That a free gift was better than a forced;
But that's all over.—I will keep it, too.
I never gave a gift and took it again.
If the wild horse should break the chariot-pole
It would be punished. Should that be in the oath?—

[*Two of the women, still singing, crouch in front of him holding the bowl over their heads. He spreads his hands over the flame.*

I swear to be obedient in all things
To Conchubar, and to uphold his children.

CONCHUBAR.

We are one being, as these flames are one.
I give my wisdom, and I take your strength.
Now thrust the swords in the flame, and pray
That they may serve the threshold and the hearthstone
With faithful service.

[*The* KINGS *kneel in a semicircle before the two women and* CUCHULAIN, *who thrusts his sword in the flame. They all put the points of their swords in the flame. The third woman is at the back near the big door.*

CUCHULAIN.

O pure glittering ones,
That should be more than wife or friend or mistress,
Give us the enduring will, the unquenchable hope,
The friendliness of the sword!—

[*The song grows louder, and the last words ring out clearly. There is a loud knocking at the door, and a cry of* "Open! open!"

CONCHUBAR.

Some king that has been loitering on the way.
Open the door, for I would have all know
That the oath's finished, and Cuchulain bound
And that the swords are drinking up the flame.

[*The door is opened by the third woman, and a* YOUNG MAN *with a drawn sword enters.*

YOUNG MAN.

I am of Aoife's army.

[*The* KINGS *rush towards him.* CUCHULAIN *throws himself between.*

CUCHULAIN.

Put up your swords.
He is but one. Aoife is far away.

YOUNG MAN.

I have come alone into the midst of you
To weigh this sword against Cuchulain's sword.

CONCHUBAR.

And are you noble? for if of common seed
You cannot weigh your sword against his sword
But in mixed battle.

YOUNG MAN.

I am under bonds
To tell my name to no man; but it's noble.

CONCHUBAR.

But I would know your name, and not your bonds.
You cannot speak in the Assembly House
If you are not noble.

FIRST KING.

Answer the High King!

YOUNG MAN.

I will give no other proof than the hawk gives—
That it's no sparrow!

[*He is silent for a moment, then speaks to all.*

Yet look upon me, kings.
I too am of that ancient seed, and carry
The signs about this body and in these bones.

CUCHULAIN.

To have shown the hawk's grey feather is enough,
And you speak highly, too. Give me that helmet!
I'd thought they had grown weary sending champions
That sword and belt will do. This fighting's welcome.
The High King there has promised me his wisdom;
But the hawk's sleepy till its well-beloved
Cries out amid the acorns, or it has seen
Its enemy like a speck upon the sun.
What's wisdom to the hawk, when that clear eye
Is burning nearer up in the high air!

[*Looks hard at* YOUNG MAN; *then comes down steps and grasps the* YOUNG MAN *by his shoulder.*

Hither into the light! [*To* CONCHUBAR.

The very tint
Of her that I was speaking of but now.
Not a pin's difference. [*To* YOUNG MAN.
You are from the North,
Where there are many that have that tint of hair—
Red-brown, the light red-brown. Come nearer, boy,
For I would have another look at you.
There's more likeness—a pale, a stone-pale cheek.
What brought you, boy? Have you no fear of death?

YOUNG MAN.

Whether I live or die is in the Gods' hands.

CUCHULAIN.

That is all words, all words; a young man's talk.
I am their plough, their harrow, their very strength;
For he that's in the sun begot this body
Upon a mortal woman, and I have heard tell
It seemed as if he had outrun the moon,

That he must follow always through waste heaven,
He loved so happily. He'll be but slow
To break a tree that was so sweetly planted.
Let's see that arm! I'll see it if I like.
That arm had a good father and a good mother,
But it is not like this.

YOUNG MAN.

You are mocking me!
You think I am not worthy to be fought.
But I'll not wrangle but with this talkative knife.

CUCHULAIN.

Put up your sword; I am not mocking you.
I'd have you for my friend; but if it's not
Because you have a hot heart and a cold eye,
I cannot tell the reason. [*To* CONCHUBAR.] He has got her fierceness,
And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.
And I will keep him with me, Conchubar,

That he may set my memory upon it
When the day's fading.
You will stop with us,
And we will hunt the deer and the wild bulls;
And, when we have grown weary, light our fires
Between the wood and water, or on some mountain
Where the shape-changers of the morning come.
The High King there would make a mock of me
Because I did not take a wife among them.
Why do you hang your head? It's a good life.
The head grows prouder in the light of the dawn,
And friendship thickens in the murmuring dark,
Where the spare hazels meet the wool-white foam.
But I can see there's no more need for words,
And that you'll be my friend from this day out.

CONCHUBAR.

He has come hither, not in his own name,
But in Queen Aoife's name; and has challenged us
In challenging the foremost man of us all.

CUCHULAIN.

Well, well, what matter!

CONCHUBAR.

You think it does not matter,
And that a fancy lighter than the air,
A whim of the moment has more matter in it,
For having none that shall reign after you,
You cannot think, as I do, who would leave
A throne too high for insult.

CUCHULAIN.

Let your children
Re-mortar their inheritance as we have,
And put more muscle on. I'll give you gifts,
But I'd have something too—that arm-ring, boy.
We'll have this quarrel out when you are older.

YOUNG MAN.

There is no man I'd sooner have my friend
Than you, whose name has gone about the world

As if it had been the wind; but Aoife'd say
I had turned coward.

CUCHULAIN.

I will give you gifts
That Aoife'll know, and all her people know,
To have come from me. [*Showing cloak, which is on a chair.*] My father gave me this.
He came to try me, rising up at dawn
Out of the cold dark of the rich sea.
He challenged me to battle, but before
My sword had touched his sword, told me his name,
Gave me this cloak, and vanished. It was woven
By women of the Country-under-Wave
Out of the fleeces of the sea. O! tell her
I was afraid, or tell her what you will.
No; tell her that I heard a raven croak
On the north side of the house, and was afraid.

CONCHUBAR.

Some witch of the air has troubled Cuchulain's mind.

CUCHULAIN.

No witchcraft. His head is like a woman's head
I had a fancy for.

CONCHUBAR.

A witch of the air
Can make a leaf confound us with memories.
They ride upon the wind and hurl the spells
That make us nothing, out of the invisible wind.
They have gone to school to learn the trick of it.

CUCHULAIN.

No, no, there's nothing out of common here;
The winds are innocent. That arm-ring, boy!

A KING.

If I've your leave, I'll take this challenge up.

ANOTHER KING.

No, give it me, High King, for that wild Aoife
Has carried off my slaves.

ANOTHER KING.

No, give it me,
For she has harried me in house and herd.

ANOTHER KING.

I claim this fight.

OTHER KINGS.

[*Together.*]

And I! and I! and I!

CUCHULAIN.

Back! back! Put up your swords! put up your swords!
There's none alive that shall accept a challenge
I have refused. Laegaire, put up your sword!

YOUNG MAN.

No, let them come! If they've a mind for it,
I'll try it out with any two together.

CUCHULAIN.

That's spoken as I'd have spoken it at your age.
But you are in my house. Whatever man
Would fight with you shall fight it out with me.
They're dumb, they're dumb! How many of you would meet [*Draws sword.*
This mutterer, this old whistler, this sand-piper,
This edge that's greyer than the tide, this mouse
That's gnawing at the timbers of the world,
This, this—? Boy, I would meet them all in arms
If I'd a son like you. He would avenge me
When I have withstood for the last time the men
Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends I have killed
Upholding Conchubar, when the four provinces
Have gathered with the ravens over them.

But I'd need no avenger. You and I
Would scatter them like water from a dish.

YOUNG MAN.

We'll stand by one another from this out.
Here is the ring.

CUCHULAIN.

No, turn and turn about.
But my turn's first, because I am the older.

[*Spreading out cloak.*

Nine queens out of the Country-under-Wave
Have woven it with the fleeces of the sea,
And they were long embroidering at it. Boy,
If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me
As certainly as if I had a son,
And fought with him I should be deadly to him,
For the old fiery fountains are far off,
And every day there is less heat o' the blood.

CONCHUBAR.

[*In a loud voice.*]

No more of that; I will not have this friendship.
Cuchulain is my man, and I forbid it.
He shall not go unfought, for I myself——

CUCHULAIN.

I will not have it.

CONCHUBAR.

You lay commands on me?

CUCHULAIN.

[*Seizing* CONCHUBAR.]

You shall not stir, High King; I'll hold you there.

CONCHUBAR.

Witchcraft has maddened you.

THE KINGS.

[*Shouting.*]

Yes, witchcraft! witchcraft!

FIRST KING.

Some witch has worked upon your mind, Cuchulain.
The head of that young man seemed like a woman's
You had a fancy for. Then of a sudden
You laid your hands on the High King himself.

[*He has taken his hands from the* HIGH KING.
He stands as if he were dazed.

CUCHULAIN.

And laid my hands on the High King himself.

CONCHUBAR.

Some witch is floating in the air above us.

CUCHULAIN.

Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft. Witches of the air.

[*To* YOUNG MAN.

Why did you? Who was it set you to this work?
Out! out, I say! for now it's sword on sword!

YOUNG MAN.

But . . . but I did not.

CUCHULAIN.

Out, I say! out! out!

[YOUNG MAN *goes out followed by* CUCHULAIN. *The* KINGS *follow them out with confused cries, and words one can hardly hear because of the noise. Some cry,* "Quicker, quicker!" "Why are you so long at the door?" "We'll be too late!" "Have they begun to fight?" *and so on; and one, it may be,* "I saw him fight with Ferdia!" *Their voices drown each other. The three women are left alone.*

FIRST WOMAN.

I have seen, I have seen.

SECOND WOMAN.

What do you cry aloud?

FIRST WOMAN.

The ever-living have shown me what's to come.

THIRD WOMAN.

How? Where?

FIRST WOMAN.

In the ashes of the bowl.

SECOND WOMAN.

While you were holding it between your hands?

THIRD WOMAN.

Speak quickly!

FIRST WOMAN.

I saw Cuchulain's roof-tree
Leap into fire, and the walls split and blacken.

SECOND WOMAN.

Cuchulain has gone out to die.

THIRD WOMAN.

O! O!

SECOND WOMAN.

Who could have thought that one so great as he
Should meet his end at this unnoted sword!

FIRST WOMAN.

Life drifts between a Fool and a Blind Man
To the end, and nobody can know his end.

SECOND WOMAN.

Come, look upon the quenching of this greatness.

[*The other two go to the door, but they stop for a moment upon the threshold and wail.*

FIRST WOMAN.

No crying out, for there'll be need of cries
And knocking at the breast when it's all finished.

[*The women go out. There is a sound of clashing swords from time to time during what follows.*

Enter the FOOL *dragging the* BLIND MAN.

FOOL.

You have eaten it, you have eaten it! You have left me nothing but the bones!

[*He throws* BLIND MAN *down by big chair.*

BLIND MAN.

O, that I should have to endure such a plague! O, I ache all over! O, I am pulled to pieces! This is the way you pay me all the good I have done you!

FOOL.

You have eaten it! You have told me lies. I might have known you had eaten it when I saw your slow, sleepy walk. Lie there till the kings come. O, I will tell Conchubar and Cuchulain and all the kings about you!

BLIND MAN.

What would have happened to you but for me,

and you without your wits? If I did not take care of you, what would you do for food and warmth?

FOOL.

You take care of me! You stay safe, and send me into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff for gull's eggs while you warmed your blind eyes in the sun; and then you ate all that were good for food. You left me the eggs that were neither egg nor bird. [BLIND MAN *tries to rise;* FOOL *makes him lie down again.*] Keep quiet now, till I shut the door. There is some noise outside—a high vexing noise, so that I can't be listening to myself. [*Shuts the big door.*] Why can't they be quiet! why can't they be quiet! [BLIND MAN *tries to get away.*] Ah! you would get away, would you! [*Follows* BLIND MAN *and brings him back.*] Lie there! lie there! No, you won't get away! Lie there till the kings come. I'll tell them all about you. I will tell it all. How you

sit warming yourself, when you have made me light a fire of sticks, while I sit blowing it with my mouth. Do you not always make me take the windy side of the bush when it blows, and the rainy side when it rains?

BLIND MAN.

O, good Fool! listen to me. Think of the care I have taken of you. I have brought you to many a warm hearth, where there was a good welcome for you, but you would not stay there; you were always wandering about.

FOOL.

The last time you brought me in it was not I who wandered away, but you that got put out because you took the crubeen out of the pot when nobody was looking. Keep quiet, now!

CUCHULAIN.

[*Rushing in.*]

Witchcraft! There is no witchcraft on the earth,

or among the witches of the air, that these hands cannot break.

FOOL.

Listen to me, Cuchulain. I left him turning the fowl at the fire. He ate it all, though I had stolen it. He left me nothing but the feathers.

CUCHULAIN.

Fill me a horn of ale!

BLIND MAN.

I gave him what he likes best. You do not know how vain this Fool is. He likes nothing so well as a feather.

FOOL.

He left me nothing but the bones and feathers. Nothing but the feathers, though I had stolen it.

CUCHULAIN.

Give me that horn! Quarrels here, too! [*Drinks.*]

What is there between you two that is worth a quarrel? Out with it!

BLIND MAN.

Where would he be but for me? I must be always thinking—thinking to get food for the two of us, and when we've got it, if the moon is at the full or the tide on the turn, he'll leave the rabbit in the snare till it is full of maggots, or let the trout slip back through his hands into the stream.

[*The* FOOL *has begun singing while the* BLIND MAN *is speaking.*

[*Sings.*]

When you were an acorn on the tree top,
Then was I an eagle cock;
Now that you are a withered old block,
Still am I an eagle cock.

BLIND MAN.

Listen to him now. That's the sort of talk I have to put up with day out, day in.

[*The* FOOL *is putting the feathers into his hair.* CUCHULAIN *takes a handful of feathers out of a heap the* FOOL *has on the bench beside him, and out of the* FOOL'S *hair, and begins to wipe the blood from his sword with them.*

FOOL.

He has taken my feathers to wipe his sword. It is blood that he is wiping from his sword.

CUCHULAIN.

[*Goes up to door at back and throws away feathers.*]

They are standing about his body. They will not awaken him, for all his witchcraft.

BLIND MAN.

It is that young champion that he has killed. He that came out of Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN.

He thought to have saved himself with witchcraft.

FOOL.

That blind man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That blind man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

CUCHULAIN.

[*To the* BLIND MAN.]

You knew him, then?

BLIND MAN.

I saw him, when I had my eyes, in Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN.

You were in Aoife's country?

BLIND MAN.

I knew him and his mother there.

CUCHULAIN.

He was about to speak of her when he died.

BLIND MAN.

He was a queen's son.

CUCHULAIN.

What queen? what queen? [*Seizes* BLIND MAN, *who is now sitting upon the bench.*] Was it Scathach? There were many queens. All the rulers there were queens.

BLIND MAN.

No, not Scathach.

CUCHULAIN.

It was Uathach, then? Speak! speak!

BLIND MAN.

I cannot speak; you are clutching me too tightly. [CUCHULAIN *lets him go.*] I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some queen.

FOOL.

He said a while ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

CUCHULAIN.

She? No, no! She had no son when I was there.

FOOL.

That blind man there said that she owned him for her son.

CUCHULAIN.

I had rather he had been some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman—a proud, pale, amorous woman.

BLIND MAN.

None knew whose son he was.

CUCHULAIN.

None knew! Did you know, old listener at doors?

BLIND MAN.

No, no; I knew nothing.

FOOL.

He said a while ago that he heard Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle. [*Pause.*

BLIND MAN.

Somebody is trembling, Fool! The bench is shaking. Why are you trembling? Is Cuchulain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchulain.

FOOL.

It is Cuchulain who is trembling. It is Cuchulain who is shaking the bench.

BLIND MAN.

It is his own son he has slain.

CUCHULAIN.

'Twas they that did it, the pale, windy people.
Where? where? where? My sword against the thunder!
But no, for they have always been my friends;
And though they love to blow a smoking coal
Till it's all flame, the wars they blow aflame
Are full of glory, and heart-uplifting pride,
And not like this. The wars they love awaken
Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.
Who did it, then? Are you afraid? Speak out!
For I have put you under my protection,
And will reward you well. Dubthach the Chafer?
He'd an old grudge. No, for he is with Maeve.
Laegaire did it! Why do you not speak?
What is this house? [*Pause.*] Now I remember all.

[*Comes before* CONCHUBAR'S *chair, and strikes out with his sword as if* CONCHUBAR *was sitting upon it.*

'Twas you who did it—you who sat up there
With your old rod of kingship, like a magpie
Nursing a stolen spoon. No, not a magpie,
A maggot that is eating up the earth!
Yes, but a magpie, for he's flown away.
Where did he fly to?

BLIND MAN.

He is outside the door.

CUCHULAIN.

Outside the door?

BLIND MAN.

Between the door and the sea.

CUCHULAIN.

Conchubar, Conchubar! the sword into your heart!

[*He rushes out. Pause.* FOOL *creeps up to the big door and looks after him.*

FOOL.

He is going up to King Conchubar. They are all about the young man. No, no, he is standing still. There is a great wave going to break, and he is looking at it. Ah! now he is running down to the sea, but he is holding up his sword as if he were going into a fight. [*Pause.*] Well struck! well struck!

BLIND MAN.

What is he doing now?

FOOL.

O! he is fighting the waves.

BLIND MAN.

He sees King Conchubar's crown on every one of them.

FOOL.

There, he has struck at a big one! He has struck the crown off it; he has made the foam fly. There again, another big one!

BLIND MAN.

Where are the kings? What are the kings doing?

FOOL.

They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses. They are all running.

BLIND MAN.

You say they are running out of the houses? There will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, Fool!

FOOL.

There, he is down! He is up again. He is going out into the deep water. There is a big wave. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him!

BLIND MAN.

Come here, Fool!

FOOL.

The waves have mastered him.

BLIND MAN.

Come here!

FOOL.

The waves have mastered him.

BLIND MAN.

Come here, I say!

FOOL.

[*Coming towards him, but looking backward towards the door.*]

What is it?

BLIND MAN.

There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way; come quickly! The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens. [*They go out.*

IN THE SEVEN WOODS

TO FLORENCE FARR

The only reciter of lyric poetry
who is always a delight, because
of the beauty of her voice and
the rightness of her method.

IN THE SEVEN WOODS

I HAVE heard the pigeons of the Seven Woods
Make their faint thunder, and the garden bees
Hum in the lime tree flowers; and put away
The unavailing outcries and the old bitterness
That empty the heart. I have forgot awhile
Tara uprooted, and new commonness
Upon the throne and crying about the streets
And hanging its paper flowers from post to post,
Because it is alone of all things happy.
I am contented for I know that Quiet
Wanders laughing and eating her wild heart
Among pigeons and bees, while that Great Archer,
Who but awaits His hour to shoot, still hangs
A cloudy quiver over Parc-na-Lee.

AUGUST, 1902

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE

MAEVE the great queen was pacing to and fro,
Between the walls covered with beaten bronze,
In her high house at Cruachan; the long hearth,
Flickering with ash and hazel, but half showed
Where the tired horse-boys lay upon the rushes,
Or on the benches underneath the walls,
In comfortable sleep; all living slept
But that great queen, who more than half the night
Had paced from door to fire and fire to door.
Though now in her old age, in her young age
She had been beautiful in that old way
That's all but gone; for the proud heart is gone,
And the fool heart of the counting-house fears all
But soft beauty and indolent desire.
She could have called over the rim of the world

Whatever woman's lover had hit her fancy,
And yet had been great bodied and great limbed,
Fashioned to be the mother of strong children;
And she'd had lucky eyes and a high heart,
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried flax,
At need, and made her beautiful and fierce,
Sudden and laughing.
O unquiet heart,
Why do you praise another, praising her,
As if there were no tale but your own tale
Worth knitting to a measure of sweet sound?
Have I not bid you tell of that great queen
Who has been buried some two thousand years?

When night was at its deepest, a wild goose
Cried from the porter's lodge, and with long clamour
Shook the ale horns and shields upon their hooks;
But the horse-boys slept on, as though some power
Had filled the house with Druid heaviness;

And wondering who of the many-changing Sidhe
Had come as in the old times to counsel her,
Maeve walked, yet with slow footfall, being old,
To that small chamber by the outer gate;
The porter slept, although he sat upright
With still and stony limbs and open eyes.
Maeve waited, and when that ear-piercing noise
Broke from his parted lips and broke again,
She laid a hand on either of his shoulders,
And shook him wide awake, and bid him say
Who of the wandering many-changing ones
Had troubled his sleep. But all he had to say
Was that, the air being heavy and the dogs
More still than they had been for a good month,
He had fallen asleep, and, though he had dreamed nothing,
He could remember when he had had fine dreams.
It was before the time of the great war
Over the White-Horned Bull, and the Brown Bull.

She turned away; he turned again to sleep
That no god troubled now, and, wondering
What matters were afoot among the Sidhe,
Maeve walked through that great hall, and with a sigh
Lifted the curtain of her sleeping room,
Remembering that she too had seemed divine
To many thousand eyes, and to her own
One that the generations had long waited
That work too difficult for mortal hands
Might be accomplished. Bunching the curtain up
She saw her husband Ailell sleeping there,
And thought of days when he'd had a straight body,
And of that famous Fergus, Nessa's husband,
Who had been the lover of her middle life.

Suddenly Ailell spoke out of his sleep,
And not with his own voice or a man's voice,
But with the burning, live, unshaken voice
Of those that it may be can never age.

He said, "High Queen of Cruachan and Magh Ai,
A king of the Great Plain would speak with you."
And with glad voice Maeve answered him, "What king
Of the far wandering shadows has come to me
As in the old days, when they would come and go
About my threshold to counsel and to help?"
The parted lips replied, "I seek your help,
For I am Aengus, and I am crossed in love."

"How may a mortal whose life gutters out
Help them that wander with hand clasping hand
By rivers where nor rain nor hail has dimmed
The haughty images, that cannot perish
Although their beauty's like a hollow dream?"

"I am from the undimmed rivers. I bid you call
The children of the Maines out of sleep,
And set them digging into Anbual's hill.

We shadows, while they uproot his earthy house,
Will overthrow his shadows and carry off
Caer, his blue-eyed daughter that I love.
I helped your fathers when they built these walls,
And I would have your help in my great need,
Queen of high Cruachan."

"I obey your will
With speedy feet and a most thankful heart:
For you have been, O Aengus of the birds,
Our giver of good counsel and good luck."
And with a groan, as if the mortal breath
Could but awaken sadly upon lips
That happier breath had moved, her husband turned
Face downward, tossing in a troubled sleep;
But Maeve, and not with a slow feeble foot,
Came to the threshold of the painted house
Where her grandchildren slept, and cried aloud,
Until the pillared dark began to stir
With shouting and the clang of unhooked arms.

She told them of the many-changing ones;
And all that night, and all through the next day
To middle night, they dug into the hill.
At middle night great cats with silver claws,
Bodies of shadow and blind eyes like pearls,
Came up out of the hole, and red-eared hounds
With long white bodies came out of the air
Suddenly, and ran at them and harried them.

The Maines' children dropped their spades, and stood
With quaking joints and terror-strucken faces,
Till Maeve called out: "These are but common men.
The Maines' children have not dropped their spades
Because Earth, crazy for its broken power,
Casts up a show and the winds answer it
With holy shadows." Her high heart was glad,
And when the uproar ran along the grass
She followed with light footfall in the midst,
Till it died out where an old thorn tree stood.

Friend of these many years, you too had stood
With equal courage in that whirling rout;
For you, although you've not her wandering heart,
Have all that greatness, and not hers alone.
For there is no high story about queens
In any ancient book but tells of you.
And when I've heard how they grew old and died,
Or fell into unhappiness, I have said:
"She will grow old and die, and she has wept!"
And when I'd write it out anew, the words,
Half crazy with the thought, She too has wept!
Outrun the measure.
I'd tell of that great queen
Who stood amid a silence by the thorn
Until two lovers came out of the air
With bodies made out of soft fire. The one,
About whose face birds wagged their fiery wings,
Said: "Aengus and his sweetheart give their thanks
To Maeve and to Maeve's household, owing all

In owing them the bride-bed that gives peace."
Then Maeve: "O Aengus, Master of all lovers,
A thousand years ago you held high talk
With the first kings of many-pillared Cruachan.
O when will you grow weary?"
They had vanished;
But out of the dark air over her head there came
A murmur of soft words and meeting lips.

BAILE AND AILLINN

Argument. Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but Aengus, the Master of Love, wishing them to be happy in his own land among the dead, told to each a story of the other's death, so that their hearts were broken and they died.

I HARDLY hear the curlew cry,
Nor the grey rush when the wind is high,
Before my thoughts begin to run
On the heir of Ulad, Buan's son,
Baile, who had the honey mouth;
And that mild woman of the south,
Aillinn, who was King Lugaid's heir.
Their love was never drowned in care
Of this or that thing, nor grew cold
Because their bodies had grown old.
Being forbid to marry on earth,
They blossomed to immortal mirth.

BAILE AND AILLINN

About the time when Christ was born,
When the long wars for the White Horn
And the Brown Bull had not yet come,
Young Baile Honey-Mouth, whom some
Called rather Baile Little-Land,
Rode out of Emain with a band
Of harpers and young men; and they
Imagined, as they struck the way
To many-pastured Muirthemne,
That all things fell out happily,
And there, for all that fools had said,
Baile and Aillinn would be wed.

They found an old man running there:
He had ragged long grass-coloured hair;
He had knees that stuck out of his hose;
He had puddle water in his shoes;
He had half a cloak to keep him dry,
Although he had a squirrel's eye.

O wandering birds and rushy beds,
You put such folly in our heads,
With all this crying in the wind,
No common love is to our mind,
And our poor Kate or Nan is less
Than any whose unhappiness
Awoke the harp-strings long ago.
Yet they that know all things but know
That all life had to give us is
A child's laughter, a woman's kiss.
Who was it put so great a scorn
In the grey reeds that night and morn
Are trodden and broken by the herds,
And in the light bodies of birds
That north wind tumbles to and fro
And pinches among hail and snow?

That runner said: "I am from the south;
I run to Baile Honey-Mouth,

To tell him how the girl Aillinn
Rode from the country of her kin,
And old and young men rode with her:
For all that country had been astir
If anybody half as fair
Had chosen a husband anywhere
But where it could see her every day.
When they had ridden a little way
An old man caught the horse's head
With: 'You must home again, and wed
With somebody in your own land.'
A young man cried and kissed her hand,
'O lady, wed with one of us';
And when no face grew piteous
For any gentle thing she spake,
She fell and died of the heart-break."

Because a lover's heart's worn out,
Being tumbled and blown about

By its own blind imagining,
And will believe that anything
That is bad enough to be true, is true,
Baile's heart was broken in two;
And he being laid upon green boughs,
Was carried to the goodly house
Where the Hound of Ulad sat before
The brazen pillars of his door,
His face bowed low to weep the end
Of the harper's daughter and her friend.
For although years had passed away
He always wept them on that day,
For on that day they had been betrayed;
And now that Honey-Mouth is laid
Under a cairn of sleepy stone
Before his eyes, he has tears for none,
Although he is carrying stone, but two
For whom the cairn's but heaped anew.

We hold because our memory is
So full of that thing and of this
That out of sight is out of mind.
But the grey rush under the wind
And the grey bird with crooked bill
Have such long memories, that they still
Remember Deirdre and her man;
And when we walk with Kate or Nan
About the windy water side,
Our heart can hear the voices chide.
How could we be so soon content,
Who know the way that Naoise went?
And they have news of Deirdre's eyes,
Who being lovely was so wise—
Ah! wise, my heart knows well how wise.

Now had that old gaunt crafty one,
Gathering his cloak about him, run
Where Aillinn rode with waiting maids,

Who amid leafy lights and shades
Dreamed of the hands that would unlace
Their bodices in some dim place
When they had come to the marriage bed;
And harpers, pondering with bowed head
A music that had thought enough
Of the ebb of all things to make love
Grow gentle without sorrowings;
And leather-coated men with slings
Who peered about on every side;
And amid leafy light he cried:
"He is well out of wind and wave;
They have heaped the stones above his grave
In Muirthemne, and over it
In changeless Ogham letters writ—
Baile, that was of Rury's seed.
But the gods long ago decreed
No waiting maid should ever spread
Baile and Aillinn's marriage bed,

For they should clip and clip again
Where wild bees hive on the Great Plain.
Therefore it is but little news
That put this hurry in my shoes."

And hurrying to the south, he came
To that high hill the herdsmen name
The Hill Seat of Leighin, because
Some god or king had made the laws
That held the land together there,
In old times among the clouds of the air.

That old man climbed; the day grew dim;
Two swans came flying up to him,
Linked by a gold chain each to each,
And with low murmuring laughing speech
Alighted on the windy grass.
They knew him: his changed body was
Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings
Were hovering over the harp-strings

That Etain, Midhir's wife, had wove
In the hid place, being crazed by love.

What shall I call them? fish that swim,
Scale rubbing scale where light is dim
By a broad water-lily leaf;
Or mice in the one wheaten sheaf
Forgotten at the threshing place;
Or birds lost in the one clear space
Of morning light in a dim sky;
Or, it may be, the eyelids of one eye,
Or the door pillars of one house,
Or two sweet blossoming apple boughs
That have one shadow on the ground;
Or the two strings that made one sound
Where that wise harper's finger ran.
For this young girl and this young man
Have happiness without an end,
Because they have made so good a friend.

They know all wonders, for they pass
The towery gates of Gorias,
And Findrias and Falias,
And long-forgotten Murias,
Among the giant kings whose hoard,
Cauldron and spear and stone and sword,
Was robbed before Earth gave the wheat;
Wandering from broken street to street
They come where some huge watcher is,
And tremble with their love and kiss.

They know undying things, for they
Wander where earth withers away,
Though nothing troubles the great streams
But light from the pale stars, and gleams
From the holy orchards, where there is none
But fruit that is of precious stone,
Or apples of the sun and moon.

What were our praise to them? they eat
Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat;
Who when night thickens are afloat
On dappled skins in a glass boat,
Far out under a windless sky,
While over them birds of Aengus fly,
And over the tiller and the prow,
And waving white wings to and fro
Awaken wanderings of light air
To stir their coverlet and their hair.

And poets found, old writers say,
A yew tree where his body lay;
But a wild apple hid the grass
With its sweet blossom where hers was;
And being in good heart, because
A better time had come again
After the deaths of many men,
And that long fighting at the ford,

They wrote on tablets of thin board,
Made of the apple and the yew,
All the love stories that they knew.

Let rush and bird cry out their fill
Of the harper's daughter if they will,
Beloved, I am not afraid of her;
She is not wiser nor lovelier,
And you are more high of heart than she,
For all her wanderings over-sea;
But I'd have bird and rush forget
Those other two; for never yet
Has lover lived, but longed to wive
Like them that are no more alive.

THE ARROW

I THOUGHT of your beauty, and this arrow,
Made out of a wild thought, is in my marrow.
There's no man may look upon her, no man;
As when newly grown to be a woman,
Blossom pale, she pulled down the pale blossom
At the moth hour and hid it in her bosom.
This beauty's kinder, yet for a reason
I could weep that the old is out of season.

THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED

ONE that is ever kind said yesterday:
"Your well beloved's hair has threads of grey,
And little shadows come about her eyes;
Time can but make it easier to be wise,
Though now it's hard, till trouble is at an end;
And so be patient, be wise and patient, friend."
But heart, there is no comfort, not a grain;
Time can but make her beauty over again,
Because of that great nobleness of hers;
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs
Burns but more clearly. O she had not these ways,
When all the wild summer was in her gaze.
O heart! O heart! if she'd but turn her head,
You'd know the folly of being comforted.

OLD MEMORY

O THOUGHT, fly to her when the end of day
Awakens an old memory, and say,
"Your strength, that is so lofty and fierce and kind,
It might call up a new age, calling to mind
The queens that were imagined long ago,
Is but half yours: he kneaded in the dough
Through the long years of youth, and who would have thought
It all, and more than it all, would come to naught,
And that dear words meant nothing?" But enough,
For when we have blamed the wind we can blame love;
Or, if there needs be more, be nothing said
That would be harsh for children that have strayed.

NEVER GIVE ALL THE HEART

NEVER give all the heart, for love
Will hardly seem worth thinking of
To passionate women if it seem
Certain, and they never dream
That it fades out from kiss to kiss;
For everything that's lovely is
But a brief, dreamy, kind delight.
Oh! never give the heart outright,
For they, for all smooth lips can say,
Have given their hearts up to the play;
And who could play it well enough
If deaf and dumb and blind with love?
He that made this knows all the cost,
For he gave all his heart and lost.

THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS

I CRIED when the moon was murmuring to the birds,
"Let peewit call and curlew cry where they will,
I long for your merry and tender and pitiful words,
For the roads are unending, and there is no place to
my mind."
The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill,
And I fell asleep upon lonely Echtge of streams.
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;
The boughs have withered because I have told them
my dreams.

I know of the leafy paths that the witches take,
Who come with their crowns of pearl and their
spindles of wool,

And their secret smile, out of the depths of the lake;
I know where a dim moon drifts, where the Danaan kind
Wind and unwind their dances, when the light grows cool
On the island lawns, their feet where the pale foam gleams.
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;
The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.

I know of the sleepy country, where swans fly round
Coupled with golden chains, and sing as they fly.
A king and a queen are wandering there, and the sound
Has made them so happy and hopeless, so deaf and so blind
With wisdom, they wander till all the years have gone by;

THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS

I know, and the curlew and peewit on Echtge of streams.

No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;

The boughs have withered because I have told them my dreams.

ADAM'S CURSE

WE sat together at one summer's end,
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,
And you and I, and talked of poetry.

I said: "A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world."

ADAM'S CURSE

That woman then
Murmured with her young voice, for whose mild sake
There's many a one shall find out all heartache
In finding that it's young and mild and low:
"There is one thing that all we women know,
Although we never heard of it at school—
That we must labour to be beautiful."

I said: "It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough."

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
We saw the last embers of daylight die,
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky

ADAM'S CURSE

A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
About the stars, and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears;
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary hearted as that hollow moon.

THE SONG OF RED HANRAHAN

THE old brown thorn trees break in two high over
Cummen Strand,
Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left
hand;
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind
and dies,
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of
the eyes
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over
Knocknarea,
And thrown the thunder on the stones for all that
Maeve can say.

THE SONG OF RED HANRAHAN

Angers that are like bundled clouds have set our
hearts abeat;
But we have all bent low and low and kissed the
quiet feet
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-
na-Bare,
For the wet winds are blowing out of the clinging air;
Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood;
But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood
Is Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

THE OLD MEN ADMIRING THEMSELVES IN THE WATER

I HEARD the old, old men say,
"Everything alters,
And one by one we drop away."
They had hands like claws, and their knees
Were twisted like the old thorn trees
By the waters.
I heard the old, old men say,
"All that's beautiful drifts away
Like the waters."

UNDER THE MOON

I HAVE no happiness in dreaming of Brycelinde,
Nor Avalon the grass-green hollow, nor Joyous Isle,
Where one found Lancelot crazed and hid him for a while;
Nor Ulad, when Naoise had thrown a sail upon the wind,
Nor lands that seem too dim to be burdens on the heart;
Land-under-Wave, where out of the moon's light and the sun's
Seven old sisters wind the threads of the long-lived ones;
Land-of-the-Tower, where Aengus has thrown the gates apart;
And Wood-of-Wonders, where one kills an ox at dawn,

To find it when night falls laid on a golden bier:
Therein are many queens like Branwen and Guinivere;
And Niam and Laban and Fand, who could change
to an otter or fawn,
And the wood-woman, whose lover was changed to a
blue-eyed hawk;
And whether I go in my dreams by woodland, or
dun, or shore,
Or on the unpeopled waves with kings to pull at the
oar,
I hear the harp-string praise them, or hear their
mournful talk.
Because of a story I heard under the thin horn
Of the third moon, that hung between the night and
the day,
To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dis-
may,
Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne.

THE PLAYERS ASK FOR A BLESSING ON THE PSALTERIES AND THEMSELVES

Three voices together:

HURRY to bless the hands that play,
The mouths that speak, the notes and strings,
O masters of the glittering town!
O! lay the shrilly trumpet down,
Though drunken with the flags that sway
Over the ramparts and the towers,
And with the waving of your wings.

First voice:

Maybe they linger by the way.
One gathers up his purple gown;

One leans and mutters by the wall—
He dreads the weight of mortal hours.

Second voice:

O no, O no! they hurry down
Like plovers that have heard the call.

Third voice:

O kinsmen of the Three in One,
O kinsmen bless the hands that play.
The notes they waken shall live on
When all this heavy history's done;
Our hands, our hands must ebb away.

Three voices together:

The proud and careless notes live on,
But bless our hands that ebb away.

THE HAPPY TOWNLAND

THERE'S many a strong farmer
Whose heart would break in two,
If he could see the townland
That we are riding to;
Boughs have their fruit and blossom
At all times of the year;
Rivers are running over
With red beer and brown beer.
An old man plays the bagpipes
In a golden and silver wood;
Queens, their eyes blue like the ice
Are dancing in a crowd.

The little fox he murmured,
"O what of the world's bane?"
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
"O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane."

When their hearts are so high
That they would come to blows,
They unhook their heavy swords
From golden and silver boughs;
But all that are killed in battle
Awaken to life again:
It is lucky that their story
Is not known among men.
For O, the strong farmers
That would let the spade lie,

Their hearts would be like a cup
That somebody had drunk dry.

The little fox he murmured,
"O what of the world's bane?"
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
"O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane."

Michael will unhook his trumpet
From a bough overhead,
And blow a little noise
When the supper has been spread.
Gabriel will come from the water
With a fish tail, and talk

THE HAPPY TOWNLAND

Of wonders that have happened
On wet roads where men walk,
And lift up an old horn
Of hammered silver, and drink
Till he has fallen asleep
Upon the starry brink.

The little fox he murmured,
"O what of the world's bane?"
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
"O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane."

THE ENTRANCE OF DEIRDRE

A LYRIC CHORUS

Two women are waiting the entrance of DEIRDRE *into the House of the Red Branch. They hear her coming and begin to sing. She comes into the house at the end of the second verse, and the women seeing her standing by* NAOISE *and shrinking back from the house, not understanding that she is afraid of what is to come, think that it is love that has made her linger thus.*

FIRST WOMAN.

"WHY is it," Queen Edane said,
"If I do but climb the stair
To the tower overhead,
When the winds are calling there,
Or the gannets calling out
In waste places of the sky,
There's so much to think about
That I cry—that I cry?"

SECOND WOMAN.

But her good man answered her,
"Love would be a thing of naught,
Had not all his limbs a stir
Born out of immoderate thought;
Were he anything by half,
Were his measures running dry.
Lovers if they may not laugh,
Have to cry—have to cry."

THE TWO WOMEN TOGETHER.

But is Edane worth a song
Now the hunt begins anew?
Praise the beautiful and strong,
Praise the redness of the yew,
Praise the blossoming apple stem.
Yet our silence had been wise;
What is all our praise to them
That have one another's eyes?

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

TO FRÀNK FAY

Because of his beautiful
speaking in the charac-
ter of Seanchan.

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

KING GUAIRE

SEANCHAN (PRONOUNCED SHANAHAN)

HIS PUPILS

THE MAYOR OF KINVARA

TWO CRIPPLES

BRIAN, AN OLD SERVANT

THE LORD HIGH CHAMBERLAIN

A SOLDIER

A MONK

COURT LADIES

TWO PRINCESSES

FEDELM

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

SCENE. *Steps before the Palace of* KING GUAIRE *at Gort. A table in front of steps at one side, with food on it, and a bench by table.* SEANCHAN *lying on steps.* PUPILS *before steps.* KING *on the upper step before a curtained door.*

KING.

I welcome you that have the mastery
Of the two kinds of Music: the one kind
Being like a woman, the other like a man.
Both you that understand stringed instruments,
And how to mingle words and notes together
So artfully, that all the Art's but Speech
Delighted with its own music; and you that carry
The long twisted horn, and understand
The heady notes that, being without words,
Can hurry beyond Time and Fate and Change.

For the high angels that drive the horse of Time—
The golden one by day, by night the silver—
Are not more welcome to one that loves the world
For some fair woman's sake.

I have called you hither
To save the life of your great master, Seanchan,
For all day long it has flamed up or flickered
To the fast cooling hearth.

OLDEST PUPIL.

When did he sicken?
Is it a fever that is wasting him?

KING.

No fever or sickness. He has chosen death:
Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
Disgrace upon me; for there is a custom,
An old and foolish custom, that if a man
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and starve

Upon another's threshold till he die,
The common people, for all time to come,
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
Even though it be the King's.

OLDEST PUPIL.

My head whirls round;
I do not know what I am to think or say.
I owe you all obedience, and yet
How can I give it, when the man I have loved
More than all others, thinks that he is wronged
So bitterly, that he will starve and die
Rather than bear it. Is there any man
Will throw his life away for a light issue?

KING.

It is but fitting that you take his side
Until you understand how light an issue
Has put us by the ears. Three days ago

I yielded to the outcry of my courtiers—
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law—
Who long had thought it against their dignity
For a mere man of words to sit amongst them
At my own table. When the meal was spread,
I ordered Seanchan to a lower table;
And when he pleaded for the poets' right,
Established at the establishment of the world,
I said that I was King, and that all rights
Had their original fountain in some king,
And that it was the men who ruled the world,
And not the men who sang to it, who should sit
Where there was the most honour. My courtiers—
Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law—
Shouted approval; and amid that noise
Seanchan went out, and from that hour,
Although there is good food and drink beside him,
Has eaten nothing.

OLDEST PUPIL.

I can breathe again.
You have taken a great burden from my mind,
For that old custom's not worth dying for.

KING.

Persuade him to eat or drink. Till yesterday
I thought that hunger and weakness had been enough;
But finding them too trifling and too light
To hold his mouth from biting at the grave,
I called you hither, and all my hope's in you,
And certain of his neighbours and good friends
That I have sent for. While he is lying there
Perishing, my good name in the world
Is perishing also. I cannot give way,
Because I am King. Because if I gave way,
My Nobles would call me a weakling, and it may be
The very throne be shaken.

OLDEST PUPIL.

I will persuade him.

Your words had been enough persuasion, King;
But being lost in sleep or reverie,
He cannot hear them.

KING.

Make him eat or drink.

Nor is it all because of my good name
I'd have him do it, for he is a man
That might well hit the fancy of a king,
Banished out of his country, or a woman's,
Or any other's that can judge a man
For what he is. But I that sit a throne,
And take my measure from the needs of the State,
Call his wild thought that overruns the measure,
Making words more than deeds, and his proud will
That would unsettle all, most mischievous,
And he himself a most mischievous man.

[*He turns to go, and then returns again.*

Promise a house with grass and tillage land,
An annual payment, jewels and silken ware,
Or anything but that old right of the poets.

[He goes into palace.

OLDEST PUPIL.

The King did wrong to abrogate our right;
But Seanchan, who talks of dying for it,
Talks foolishly. Look at us, Seanchan;
Waken out of your dream and look at us,
Who have ridden under the moon and all the day,
Until the moon has all but come again,
That we might be beside you.

SEANCHAN.

[Half turning round, leaning on his elbow, and speaks as if in a dream.

I was but now
In Almhuin, in a great high-raftered house,

With Finn and Osgar. Odours of roast flesh
Rose round me, and I saw the roasting-spits;
And then the dream was broken, and I saw
Grania dividing salmon by a stream;
And then I was awakened by your voice.

OLDEST PUPIL.

Hunger has made you dream of roasting flesh;
And though I all but weep to think of it,
The hunger of the crane, that starves himself
At the full moon because he is afraid
Of his own shadow and the glittering water,
Seems to me little more fantastical
Than this of yours.

SEANCHAN.

Why, that's the very truth.
It is as though the moon changed every thing—
Myself and all that I can hear and see;
For when the heavy body has grown weak,

There's nothing that can tether the wild mind
That, being moonstruck and fantastical,
Goes where it fancies. I had even thought
I knew your voice and face, but now the words
Are so unlikely that I needs must ask
Who is it that bids me put my hunger by.

OLDEST PUPIL.

I am your oldest pupil, Seanchan;
The one that has been with you many years—
So many, that you said at Candlemas
That I had almost done with school, and knew
All but all that poets understand.

SEANCHAN.

My oldest pupil? No, that cannot be,
For it is some one of the courtly crowds
That have been round about me from sunrise,
And I am tricked by dreams; but I'll refute them.

At Candlemas I bid that pupil tell me
Why poetry is honoured, wishing to know
If he had any weighty argument
For distant countries and strange, churlish kings.
What did he answer?

OLDEST PUPIL.

I said the poets hung
Images of the life that was in Eden
About the child-bed of the world, that it,
Looking upon those images, might bear
Triumphant children. But why must I stand here,
Repeating an old lesson, while you starve?

SEANCHAN.

Tell on, for I begin to know the voice.
What evil thing will come upon the world
If the Arts perish?

OLDEST PUPIL.

If the Arts should perish,
The world that lacked them would be like a woman,
That looking on the cloven lips of a hare,
Brings forth a hare-lipped child.

SEANCHAN.

But that's not all:
For when I asked you how a man should guard
Those images, you had an answer also,
If you're the man that you have claimed to be,
Comparing them to venerable things
God gave to men before he gave them wheat.

OLDEST PUPIL.

I answered—and the word was half your own—
That he should guard them as the Men of Dea
Guard their four treasures, as the Grail King guards
His holy cup, or the pale, righteous horse

The jewel that is underneath his horn,
Pouring out life for it as one pours out
Sweet heady wine. . . . But now I understand;
You would refute me out of my own mouth;
And yet a place at table, near the King,
Is nothing of great moment, Seanchan.
How does so light a thing touch poetry?

[SEANCHAN *is now sitting up. He still looks dreamily in front of him.*

SEANCHAN.

At Candlemas you called this poetry
One of the fragile, mighty things of God,
That die at an insult.

CLDEST PUPIL.

[*To other* PUPILS.]

Give me some true answer,
For on that day we spoke about the Court,

And said that all that was insulted there
The world insulted, for the Courtly life,
Being the first comely child of the world,
Is the world's model. How shall I answer him?
Can you not give me some true argument?
I will not tempt him with a lying one.

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

O, tell him that the lovers of his music
Have need of him.

SEANCHAN.

But I am labouring
For some that shall be born in the nick o' time,
And find sweet nurture, that they may have voices,
Even in anger, like the strings of harps;
And how could they be born to majesty
If I had never made the golden cradle?

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

[*Throwing himself at* SEANCHAN'S *feet.*]

Why did you take me from my father's fields?
If you would leave me now, what shall I love?
Where shall I go? What shall I set my hand to?
And why have you put music in my ears,
If you would send me to the clattering houses?
I will throw down the trumpet and the harp,
For how could I sing verses or make music
With none to praise me, and a broken heart?

SEANCHAN.

What was it that the poets promised you,
If it was not their sorrow? Do not speak.
Have I not opened school on these bare steps,
And are not you the youngest of my scholars?
And I would have all know that when all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,

Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame,
God's laughter at the shattering of the world.
And now that joy laughs out, and weeps and burns
On these bare steps.

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

O master, do not die!

OLDEST PUPIL.

Trouble him with no useless argument.
Be silent! There is nothing we can do
Except find out the King and kneel to him,
And beg our ancient right.
For here are some
To say whatever we could say and more,
And fare as badly. Come, boy, that is no use.
[*Raises* YOUNG PUPIL.
If it seem well that we beseech the King,
Lay down your harps and trumpets on the stones

In silence, and come with me silently.
Come with slow footfalls, and bow all your heads,
For a bowed head becomes a mourner best.

[*They lay harps and trumpets down one by one, and then go out very solemnly and slowly, following one another. Enter* MAYOR, TWO CRIPPLES, *and* BRIAN, *an old* SERVANT. *The* MAYOR, *who has been heard, before he came upon the stage, muttering* "Chief Poet," "Ireland," etc., *crosses in front of* SEANCHAN *to the other side of the steps.* BRIAN *takes food out of basket. The* CRIPPLES *are interested in the basket. The* MAYOR *has an Ogham stick in his hand.*

MAYOR.

[*As he crosses.*]

"Chief Poet," "Ireland," "Townsman," "grazing land,"
Those are the words I have to keep in mind—

"Chief Poet," "Ireland," "Townsman," "grazing land."
I have the words. They are all upon the ogham.
"Chief Poet," "Ireland," "Townsman," "grazing land."
But what's their order?

[*He keeps muttering over his speech during what follows.*

FIRST CRIPPLE.

The King were rightly served
If Seanchan drove his good luck away.
What's there about a king, that's in the world
From birth to burial, like another man,
That he should change old customs, that were in it
As long as ever the world has been a world?

SECOND CRIPPLE.

If I were king I would not meddle with him,
For there is something queer about a poet.
I knew of one that would be making rhyme

Under a thorn at crossing of three roads.
He was as ragged as ourselves, and yet
He was no sooner dead than every thorn tree
From Inchy to Kiltartan withered away.

FIRST CRIPPLE.

The King is but a fool!

MAYOR.

Hush! I am getting ready.

FIRST CRIPPLE.

A poet has power from beyond the world,
That he may set our thoughts upon old times,
And lucky queens and little holy fish
That rise up every seventh year——

MAYOR.

Hush! hush!

FIRST CRIPPLE.

To cure the crippled.

MAYOR.

I am half ready now.

BRIAN.

There's not a mischief I'd begrudge the King
If it were any other——

MAYOR.

Hush! I am ready.

BRIAN.

That died to get it. I have brought out the food,
And if my master will not eat of it,
I'll home and get provision for his wake,
For that's no great way off. Well, have your say,
But don't be long about it.

MAYOR.

[*Goes close to* SEANCHAN.]

Chief Poet of Ireland,
I am the Mayor of your own town, Kinvara,

And I am come to tell you that the news
Of this great trouble with the King of Gort
Has plunged us in deep sorrow—part for you,
Our honoured townsman, part for our good town.

[*Begins to hesitate; scratching his head.*

But what comes now? Something about the King.

BRIAN.

Get on! get on! The food is all set out.

MAYOR.

Don't hurry me.

FIRST CRIPPLE.

Give us a taste of it.

He'll not begrudge it.

SECOND CRIPPLE.

Let them that have their limbs
Starve if they will. We have to keep in mind
The stomach God has left to us.

MAYOR.

Hush! I have it!
The King was said to be most friendly to us,
And we have reason, as you'll recollect,
For thinking that he was about to give
Those grazing lands inland we so much need,
Being pinched between the water and the stones.
Our mowers mow with knives between the stones;
The sea washes the meadows. You know well
We have asked nothing but what's reasonable.

SEANCHAN.

Reason in plenty. Yellowy white hair,
A hollow face, and not too many teeth.
How comes it he has been so long in the world
And not found Reason out?

[*While saying this he has turned half round. He hardly looks at the* MAYOR.

BRIAN.

[*Trying to pull* MAYOR *away.*]

What good is there
In telling him what he has heard all day!
I will set food before him.

MAYOR.

[*Shoving* BRIAN *away.*]

Don't hurry me!
It's small respect you're showing to the town!
Get farther off! [*To* SEANCHAN.] We would not have you think,
Weighty as these considerations are,
That they have been as weighty in our minds
As our desire that one we take much pride in,
A man that's been an honour to our town,
Should live and prosper; therefore we beseech you
To give way in a matter of no moment,

A matter of mere sentiment—a trifle—
That we may always keep our pride in you.

[*He finishes this speech with a pompous air, motions to* BRIAN *to bring the food to* SEANCHAN, *and sits on seat.*

BRIAN.

Master, master, eat this! It's not king's food,
That's cooked for everybody and nobody.
Here's barley bread out of your father's oven,
And dulse from Duras. Here is the dulse, your honour;
It's wholesome, and has the good taste of the sea.

[*Takes dulse in one hand and bread in other and presses them into* SEANCHAN'S *hands.* SEANCHAN *shows by his movement his different feeling to* BRIAN.

FIRST CRIPPLE.

He has taken it, and there'll be nothing left!

SECOND CRIPPLE.

Nothing at all; he wanted his own sort.
What's honey to a cat, corn to a dog,
Or a green apple to a ghost in a churchyard?

SEANCHAN.

[*Pressing food back into* BRIAN'S *hands.*]

Eat it yourself, for you have come a journey,
And it may be have eaten nothing on the way.

BRIAN.

How could I eat it, and your honour starving!
It is your father sends it, and he cried
Because the stiffness that is in his bones
Prevented him from coming, and bid me tell you
That he is old, that he has need of you,
And that the people will be pointing at him,
And he not able to lift up his head,
If you should turn the King's favour away;

And he adds to it, that he cared you well,
And you in your young age, and that it's right
That you should care him now.

SEANCHAN.

[*Who is now interested.*]

And is that all?
What did my mother say?

BRIAN.

She gave no message;
For when they told her you had it in mind to starve,
Or get again the ancient right of the poets,
She said: "No message can do any good.
He will not send the answer that you want.
We cannot change him." And she went indoors,
Lay down upon the bed, and turned her face
Out of the light. And thereupon your father
Said: "Tell him that his mother sends no message,
Albeit broken down and miserable." [*A pause.*

Here is a pigeon's egg from Duras, and these others
Were laid by your own hens.

SEANCHAN.

She has sent no message.
Our mothers know us; they know us to the bone.
They knew us before birth, and that is why
They know us even better than the sweethearts
Upon whose breasts we have lain.
Go quickly! Go
And tell them that my mother was in the right.
There is no answer. Go and tell them that.
Go tell them that she knew me.

MAYOR.

What is he saying?
I never understood a poet's talk
More than the baa of a sheep!

[*Comes over from seat.* SEANCHAN *turns away.*

You have not heard,
It may be, having been so much away,
How many of the cattle died last winter
From lacking grass, and that there was much sickness
Because the poor have nothing but salt fish
To live on through the winter?

BRIAN.

Get away,
And leave the place to me! It's my turn now,
For your sack's empty!

MAYOR.

Is it get away!
Is that the way I'm to be spoken to!
Am I not Mayor? Amn't I authority?
Amn't I in the King's place? Answer me that!

BRIAN.

Then show the people what a king is like:
Pull down old merings and root custom up,
Whitewash the dung-hills, fatten hogs and geese,
Hang your gold chain about an ass's neck,
And burn the blessed thorn trees out of the fields,
And drive what's comely away!

MAYOR.

Holy Saint Coleman!

FIRST CRIPPLE.

Fine talk! fine talk! What else does the King do?
He fattens hogs and drives the poet away!

SECOND CRIPPLE.

He starves the song-maker!

FIRST CRIPPLE.

He fattens geese!

MAYOR.

How dare you take his name into your mouth!
How dare you lift your voice against the King!
What would we be without him?

BRIAN.

Why do you praise him?
I will have nobody speak well of him,
Or any other king that robs my master.

MAYOR.

And had he not the right to? and the right
To strike your master's head off, being the King,
Or yours or mine? I say, "Long live the King!
Because he does not take our heads from us."
Call out "Long life to him!"

BRIAN.

Call out for him!

[*Speaking at same time with* MAYOR.

There's nobody'll call out for him,
But the smiths will turn their anvils,
The millers turn their wheels,
The farmers turn their churns,
The witches turn their thumbs,
'Till he be broken and splintered into pieces.

MAYOR.

[*At same time with* BRIAN.]

He might, if he'd a mind to it,
Be digging out our tongues,
Or dragging out our hair,
Or bleaching us like calves,
Or weaning us like lambs,
But for the kindness and the softness that is in him.

[*They gasp for breath.*

FIRST CRIPPLE.

I'll curse him till I drop!

[*Speaking at same time as* SECOND CRIPPLE *and* MAYOR *and* BRIAN, *who have begun again.*

The curse of the poor be upon him,
The curse of the widows upon him,
The curse of the children upon him,
The curse of the bishops upon him,
Until he be as rotten as an old mushroom!

SECOND CRIPPLE.

[*Speaking at same time as* FIRST CRIPPLE *and* MAYOR *and* BRIAN.

The curse of wrinkles be upon him!
Wrinkles where his eyes are,
Wrinkles where his nose is,
Wrinkles where his mouth is,
And a little old devil looking out of every wrinkle!

BRIAN.

[*Speaking at same time with* MAYOR *and* CRIPPLES.]

And nobody will sing for him,

And nobody will h'ınt for him,

And nobody will fish for him,

And nobody will pray for him,

But ever and always curse him and abuse him.

MAYOR.

[*Speaking at same time with* CRIPPLES *and* BRIAN.

What good is in a poet?

Has he money in a stocking,

Or cider in the cellar,

Or flitches in the chimney,

Or anything anywhe-e but his own idleness?

[BRIAN *seizes* MAYOR.

MAYOR.

Help! help! Am I not authority?

BRIAN.

That's how I'll shout for the King!

MAYOR.

Help! help! Am I not in the King's place?

BRIAN.

I'll teach him to be kind to the poor!

MAYOR.

Help! help! Wait till we are in Kinvara!

FIRST CRIPPLE.

[*Beating* MAYOR *on the legs with crutch.*]

I'll shake the royalty out of his legs!

SECOND CRIPPLE.

[*Burying his nails in* MAYOR'S *face.*]

I'll scrumble the ermine out of his skin!

[*The* CHAMBERLAIN *comes down steps shouting*, "Silence! silence! silence!"

CHAMBERLAIN.

How dare you make this uproar at the doors,
Deafening the very greatest in the land,
As if the farmyards and the rookeries
Had all been emptied!

FIRST CRIPPLE.

It is the Chamberlain.

[CRIPPLES *go out.*

CHAMBERLAIN.

Pick up the litter there, and get you gone!
Be quick about it! Have you no respect
For this worn stair, this all but sacred door,
Where suppliants and tributary kings
Have passed, and the world's glory knelt in silence?
Have you no reverence for what all other men
Hold honourable?

BRIAN.

If I might speak my mind,
I'd say the King would have his luck again
If he would let my master have his rights.

CHAMBERLAIN.

Pick up your litter! Take your noise away!
Make haste, and get the clapper from the bell!

BRIAN.

[*Putting last of food into basket.*]

What do the great and powerful care for rights
That have no armies!

[CHAMBERLAIN *begins shoving them out with his staff.*

MAYOR.

My lord, I am not to blame.
I'm the King's man, and they attacked me for it.

BRIAN.

We have our prayers, our curses and our prayers,
And we can give a great name or a bad one.

[MAYOR *is shoving* BRIAN *out before him with one hand. He keeps his face to* CHAMBERLAIN, *and keeps bowing. The* CHAMBERLAIN *shoves him with his staff.*

MAYOR.

We could not make the poet eat, my lord.

[CHAMBERLAIN *shoves him with staff.*

Much honoured [*is shoved again*]—honoured to speak with you, my lord;
But I'll go find the girl that he's to marry.
She's coming, but I'll hurry her, my lord.
Between ourselves, my lord [*is shoved again*], she is a great coaxer.
Much honoured, my lord. O, she's the girl to do it;
For when the intellect is out, my lord,

Nobody but a woman's any good. [*Is shoved again.*
Much honoured, my lord [*is shoved again*], much
honoured, much honoured!

[*Is shoved out, shoving* BRIAN *out before him.*

[*All through this scene, from the outset of the quarrel,* SEANCHAN *has kept his face turned away, or hidden in his cloak. While the* CHAMBERLAIN *has been speaking, the* SOLDIER *and the* MONK *have come out of the palace. The* MONK *stands on top of steps at one side,* SOLDIER *a little down steps at the other side.* COURT LADIES *are seen at opening in the palace curtain behind* SOLDIER. CHAMBERLAIN *is in the centre.*

CHAMBERLAIN.

[*To* SEANCHAN.]

Well, you must be contented, for your work
Has roused the common sort against the King,

And stolen his authority. The State
Is like some orderly and reverend house,
Wherein the master, being dead of a sudden,
The servants quarrel where they have a mind to,
And pilfer here and there.

[*Pause, finding that* SEANCHAN *does not answer.*

How many days
Will you keep up this quarrel with the King,
And the King's nobles, and myself, and all,
Who'd gladly be your friends, if you would let them?

[*Going near to* MONK.

If you would try, you might persuade him, father.
I cannot make him answer me, and yet
If fitting hands would offer him the food,
He might accept it.

MONK.

Certainly I will not.
I've made too many homilies, wherein

The wanton imagination of the poets
Has been condemned, to be his flatterer.
If pride and disobedience are unpunished,
Who will obey?

CHAMBERLAIN.

[*Going to other side towards* SOLDIER.]

If you would speak to him,
You might not find persuasion difficult,
With all the devils of hunger helping you.

SOLDIER.

I will not interfere, for if he starve
For being obstinate and stiff in the neck,
'Tis but good riddance.

CHAMBERLAIN.

One of us must do it.
It might be, if you'd reason with him, ladies,
He would eat something, for I have a notion

That if he brought misfortune on the King,
Or the King's house, we'd be as little thought of
As summer linen when the winter's come.

FIRST GIRL.

But it would be the greater compliment
If Peter'd do it.

SECOND GIRL.

Reason with him, Peter.
Persuade him to eat; he's such a bag of bones!

SOLDIER.

I'll never trust a woman's word again!
There's nobody that was so loud against him
When he was at the table; now the wind's changed,
And you that could not bear his speech or his silence,
Would have him there in his old place again;
I do believe you would, but I won't help you.

SECOND GIRL.

Why will you be so hard upon us, Peter?
You know we have turned the common sort against us,
And he looks miserable.

FIRST GIRL.

We cannot dance,
Because no harper will pluck a string for us.

SECOND GIRL.

I cannot sleep with thinking of his face.

FIRST GIRL.

And I love dancing more than anything.

SECOND GIRL.

Do not be hard on us; but yesterday
A woman in the road threw stones at me.
You would not have me stoned?

FIRST GIRL.

May I not dance?

SOLDIER.

I will do nothing. You have put him out,
And now that he is out—well, leave him out.

FIRST GIRL.

Do it for my sake, Peter.

SECOND GIRL.

And for mine.

[*Each girl as she speaks takes* PETER'S *hand with her right hand, stroking down his arm with her left. While* SECOND GIRL *is stroking his arm,* FIRST GIRL *leaves go and gives him the dish.*

SOLDIER.

Well, well; but not your way. [*To* SEANCHAN.]
Here's meat for you.

It has been carried from too good a table
For men like you, and I am offering it
Because these women have made a fool of me.

[*A pause.*

You mean to starve? You will have none of it?
I'll leave it there, where you can sniff the savour.
Snuff it, old hedgehog, and unroll yourself!
But if I were the King, I'd make you do it
With wisps of lighted straw.

SEANCHAN.

You have rightly named me.
I lie rolled up under the ragged thorns
That are upon the edge of those great waters
Where all things vanish away, and I have heard
Murmurs that are the ending of all sound.
I am out of life; I am rolled up, and yet,
Hedgehog although I am, I'll not unroll
For you, king's dog! Go to the king, your master.

Crouch down and wag your tail, for it may be
He has nothing now against you, and I think
The stripes of your last beating are all healed.

[*The* SOLDIER *has drawn his sword.*

CHAMBERLAIN.

[*Striking up sword.*]

Put up your sword, sir; put it up, I say!
The common sort would tear you into pieces
If you but touched him.

SOLDIER.

If he's to be flattered,
Petted, cajoled, and dandled into humour,
We might as well have left him at the table.

[*Goes to one side sheathing sword.*

SEANCHAN.

You must need keep your patience yet awhile,
For I have some few mouthfuls of sweet air

To swallow before I have grown to be as civil
As any other dust.

CHAMBERLAIN.

You wrong us, Seanchan.
There is none here but holds you in respect;
And if you'd only eat out of this dish,
The King would show how much he honours you.

[*Bowing and smiling.*

Who could imagine you'd so take to heart
Being put from the high table? I am certain
That you, if you will only think it over,
Will understand that it is men of law,
Leaders of the king's armies, and the like,
That should sit there.

SEANCHAN.

Somebody has deceived you,
Or maybe it was your own eyes that lied,

In making it appear that I was driven
From the King's table. You have driven away
The images of them that weave a dance
By the four rivers in the mountain garden.

CHAMBERLAIN.

You mean we have driven poetry away.
But that's not altogether true, for I,
As you should know, have written poetry.
And often when the table has been cleared,
And candles lighted, the King calls for me,
And I repeat it him. My poetry
Is not to be compared with yours; but still,
Where I am honoured, poetry is honoured—
In some measure.

SEANCHAN.

If you are a poet,
Cry out that the King's money would not buy,
Nor the high circle consecrate his head,

If poets had never christened gold, and even
The moon's poor daughter, that most whey-faced
metal,
Precious; and cry out that none alive
Would ride among the arrows with high heart,
Or scatter with an open hand, had not
Our heady craft commended wasteful virtues.
And when that story's finished, shake your coat
Where little jewels gleam on it, and say,
A herdsman, sitting where the pigs had trampled,
Made up a song about enchanted kings,
Who were so finely dressed, one fancied them
All fiery, and women by the churn
And children by the hearth caught up the song
And murmured it, until the sailors heard it.

CHAMBERLAIN.

If you would but eat something you'd find out
That you have had these thoughts from lack of food,
For hunger makes us feverish.

SEANCHAN.

Cry aloud,
That when we are driven out we come again
Like a great wind that runs out of the waste
To blow the tables flat; and thereupon
Lie down upon the threshold till the King
Restore to us the ancient right of the poets.

MONK.

You cannot shake him. I will to the King,
And offer him consolation in his trouble,
For that man there has set his teeth to die.
And being one that hates obedience,
Discipline, and orderliness of life,
I cannot mourn him.

FIRST GIRL.

'Twas you that stirred it up.
You stirred it up that you might spoil our dancing.

Why shouldn't we have dancing? We're not in Lent.
Yet nobody will pipe or play to us;
And they will never do it if he die.
And that is why you are going.

MONK.

What folly's this?

FIRST GIRL.

Well, if you did not do it, speak to him—
Use your authority; make him obey you.
What harm is there in dancing?

MONK.

Hush! begone!
Go to the fields and watch the hurley players,
Or any other place you have a mind to.
This is not woman's work.

FIRST GIRL.

Come! let's away!
We can do nothing here.

MONK.

The pride of the poets!
Dancing, hurling, the country full of noise,
And king and church neglected. Seanchan,
I'll take my leave, for you are perishing
Like all that let the wanton imagination
Carry them where it will, and it's not likely
I'll look upon your living face again.

SEANCHAN.

Come nearer, nearer!

MONK.

Have you some last wish?

SEANCHAN.

Stoop down, for I would whisper it in your ear.
Has that wild God of yours, that was so wild
When you'd but lately taken the King's pay,
Grown any tamer? He gave you all much trouble.

MONK.

Let go my habit!

SEANCHAN.

Have you persuaded him
To chirp between two dishes when the King
Sits down to table?

MONK.

Let go my habit, sir!

[*Crosses to centre of stage.*

SEANCHAN.

And maybe he has learnt to sing quite softly
Because loud singing would disturb the King,
Who is sitting drowsily among his friends
After the table has been cleared. Not yet!

[SEANCHAN *has been dragged some feet clinging to the* MONK'S *habit.*

SEANCHAN.

You did not think that hands so full of hunger
Could hold you tightly. They are not civil yet.
I'd know if you have taught him to eat bread
From the King's hand, and perch upon his finger.
I think he perches on the King's strong hand.
But it may be that he is still too wild.
You must not weary in your work; a king
Is often weary, and he needs a God
To be a comfort to him.

[*The* MONK *plucks his habit away and goes into palace.* SEANCHAN *holds up his hand as if a bird perched upon it. He pretends to stroke the bird.*

A little God,
With comfortable feathers, and bright eyes.

FIRST GIRL.

There will be no more dancing in our time,
For nobody will play the harp or the fiddle.
Let us away, for we cannot amend it,
And watch the hurley.

SECOND GIRL.

Hush! he is looking at us.

SEANCHAN.

Yes, yes, go to the hurley, go to the hurley,
Go to the hurley! Gather up your skirts—
Run quickly! You can remember many love songs;
I know it by the light that's in your eyes—
But you'll forget them. You're fair to look upon.
Your feet delight in dancing, and your mouths
In the slow smiling that awakens love.
The mothers that have borne you mated rightly,

For they had little ears as thirsty as your ears
For many love songs. Go to the young men.
Are not the ruddy flesh and the thin flanks
And the broad shoulders worthy of desire?
Go from me! Here is nothing for your eyes.
But it is I that am singing you away—
Singing you to the young men.

[*The* TWO YOUNG PRINCESSES *come out of palace. While he had been speaking the* GIRLS *have shrunk back holding each other's hands.*

FIRST GIRL.

Be quiet!
Look who it is has come out of the house.
Princesses, we are for the hurling field.
Will you come too?

FIRST PRINCESS.

We will go with you, Aileen.
But we must have some words with Seanchan,
For we have come to make him eat and drink.

CHAMBERLAIN.

I will hold out the dish and cup for him
While you are speaking to him of his folly,
If you desire it, Princess.

[*He has taken dish and cup.*

FIRST PRINCESS.

No, Finula
Will carry him the dish and I the cup.
We'll offer them ourselves. [*They take cup and dish.*

FIRST GIRL.

They are so gracious;
The dear little Princesses are so gracious.

[PRINCESS *holds out her hand for* SEANCHAN *to kiss it. He does not move.*

Although she is holding out her hand to him,
He will not kiss it.

FIRST PRINCESS.

My father bids us say
That, though he cannot have you at his table,
You may ask any other thing you like
And he will give it you. We carry you
With our own hands a dish and cup of wine.

FIRST GIRL.

O, look! he has taken it! He has taken it!
The dear Princesses! I have always said
That nobody could refuse them anything.

[SEANCHAN *takes the cup in one hand. In the other he holds for a moment the hand of the* PRINCESS.

SEANCHAN.

O long, soft fingers and pale finger-tips,
Well worthy to be laid in a king's hand!
O, you have fair white hands, for it is certain
There is uncommon whiteness in these hands.
But there is something comes into my mind,
Princess. A little while before your birth,
I saw your mother sitting by the road
In a high chair; and when a leper passed,
She pointed him the way into the town.
He lifted up his hand and blessed her hand—
I saw it with my own eyes. Hold out your hands;
I will find out if they are contaminated.
For it has come into my thoughts that maybe
The King has sent me food and drink by hands
That are contaminated. I would see all your hands.
You've eyes of dancers; but hold out your hands,
For it may be there are none sound among you.

[*The* PRINCESSES *have shrunk back in terror.*

FIRST PRINCESS.

He has called us lepers. [SOLDIER *draws sword.*

CHAMBERLAIN.

He's out of his mind,
And does not know the meaning of what he said.

SEANCHAN.

[*Standing up.*]

There's no sound hand among you—no sound hand.
Away with you! away with all of you!
You are all lepers! There is leprosy
Among the plates and dishes that you have carried.
And wherefore have you brought me leper's wine?
[*He flings the contents of the cup in their faces.*
There, there! I have given it to you again. And now
Begone, or I will give my curse to you.
You have the leper's blessing, but you think

Maybe the bread will something lack in savour
Unless you mix my curse into the dough.

[*They go out hurriedly in all directions.* SEAN-CHAN *is staggering in the middle of the stage.*

Where did I say the leprosy had come from?
I said it came out of a leper's hand,

[*Enter* CRIPPLES.

And that he walked the highway. But that's folly,
For he was walking up there in the sky.
And there he is even now, with his white hand
Thrust out of the blue air, and blessing them
With leprosy.

FIRST CRIPPLE.

He's pointing at the moon
That's coming out up yonder, and he calls it
Leprous, because the daylight whitens it.

LIBRARY

SEANCHAN.

He's holding up his hand above them all—
King, noblemen, princesses—blessing all.
Who could imagine he'd have so much patience?

FIRST CRIPPLE.

[*Clutching the other* CRIPPLE.]

Come out of this!

SECOND CRIPPLE.

[*Pointing to food.*]

If you don't need it, sir,
May we not carry some of it away?

[*They cross towards food and pass in front of* SEANCHAN.

SEANCHAN.

Who's speaking? Who are you?

FIRST CRIPPLE.

Come out of this!

SECOND CRIPPLE.

Have pity on us, that must beg our bread
From table to table throughout the entire world,
And yet be hungry.

SEANCHAN.

But why were you born crooked?
What bad poet did your mothers listen to
That you were born so crooked?

CRIPPLE.

Come away!
Maybe he's cursed the food, and it might kill us.

OTHER CRIPPLE.

Yes, better come away. [*They go out.*

SEANCHAN.

[*Staggering, and speaking wearily.*]

He has great strength
And great patience to hold his right hand there,
Uplifted and not wavering about.
He is much stronger than I am, much stronger.

[*Sinks down on steps. Enter* MAYOR *and* FEDELM.

FEDELM.

[*Her finger on her lips.*]

Say nothing! I will get him out of this
Before I have said a word of food and drink;
For while he is on this threshold and can hear,
It may be, the voices that made mock of him,
He would not listen. I'd be alone with him.

[MAYOR *goes out.* FEDELM *goes to* SEANCHAN *and kneels before him.*

Seanchan! Seanchan!

[*He remains looking into the sky.*

Can you not hear me, Seanchan?
It is myself.

[*He looks at her, dreamily at first, then takes her hand.*

SEANCHAN.

Is this your hand, Fedelm?
I have been looking at another hand
That is up yonder.

FEDELM.

I have come for you.

SEANCHAN.

Fedelm, I did not know that you were here.

FEDELM.

And can you not remember that I promised
That I would come and take you home with me

When I'd the harvest in? And now I've come,
And you must come away, and come on the instant.

SEANCHAN.

Yes, I will come. But is the harvest in?
This air has got a summer taste in it.

FEDELM.

But is not the wild middle of the summer
A better time to marry? Come with me now!

SEANCHAN.

[*Seizing her by both wrists.*]

Who taught you that? For it's a certainty,
Although I never knew it till last night,
That marriage, because it is the height of life,
Can only be accomplished to the full
In the high days of the year. I lay awake:
There had come a frenzy into the light of the stars,

And they were coming nearer, and I knew
All in a minute they were about to marry
Clods out upon the ploughlands, to beget
A mightier race than any that has been.
But some that are within there made a noise,
And frighted them away.

FEDELM.

Come with me now!
We have far to go, and daylight's running out.

SEANCHAN.

The stars had come so near me that I caught
Their singing. It was praise of that great race
That would be haughty, mirthful, and whitebodied,
With a high head, and open hand, and how,
Laughing, it would take the mastery of the world.

FEDELM.

But you will tell me all about their songs
When we're at home. You have need of rest and
care,
And I can give them you when we're at home.
And therefore let us hurry, and get us home.

SEANCHAN.

It's certain that there is some trouble here,
Although it's gone out of my memory.
And I would get away from it. Give me your help.
[*Trying to rise.*
But why are not my pupils here to help me?
Go, call my pupils, for I need their help.

FEDELM.

Come with me now, and I will send for them,
For I have a great room that's full of beds

I can make ready; and there is a smooth lawn
Where they can play at hurley and sing poems
Under an apple tree.

SEANCHAN.

I know that place:
An apple tree, and a smooth level lawn
Where the young men can sway their hurley sticks.

[*Sings.*]

The four rivers that run there,
Through well-mown level ground,
Have come out of a blessed well
That is all bound and wound
By the great roots of an apple,
And all the fowl of the air
Have gathered in the wide branches
And keep singing there.

[FEDELM, *troubled, has covered her eyes with her hands.*

FEDELM.

No, there are not four rivers, and those rhymes
Praise Adam's paradise.

SEANCHAN.

I can remember now,
It's out of a poem I made long ago
About the Garden in the East of the World,
And how spirits in the images of birds
Crowd in the branches of old Adam's crab-tree.
They come before me now, and dig in the fruit
With so much gluttony, and are so drunk
With that harsh wholesome savour, that their feathers
Are clinging one to another with the juice.
But you would lead me to some friendly place,
And I would go there quickly.

FEDELM.

[*Helping him to rise.*]

Come with me.

[*He walks slowly, supported by her, till he comes to table.*

SEANCHAN.

But why am I so weak? Have I been ill?
Sweetheart, why is it that I am so weak?

[*Sinks on to seat.*

FEDELM.

[*Goes to table.*]

I'll dip this piece of bread into the wine,
For that will make you stronger for the journey.

SEANCHAN.

Yes, give me bread and wine; that's what I want,
For it is hunger that is gnawing me.

[*He takes bread from* FEDELM, *hesitates, and then thrusts it back into her hand.*

But, no; I must not eat it.

FEDELM.

Eat, Seanchan.

For if you do not eat it you will die.

SEANCHAN.

Why did you give me food? Why did you come?
For had I not enough to fight against
Without your coming?

FEDELM.

Eat this little crust,
Seanchan, if you have any love for me.

SEANCHAN.

I must not eat it—but that's beyond your wit.
Child! child! I must not eat it, though I die.

FEDELM.

[*Passionately.*]

You do not know what love is; for if you loved,
You would put every other thought away.
But you have never loved me.

SEANCHAN.

[*Seizing her by wrist.*]

You, a child,
Who have but seen a man out of the window,
Tell me that I know nothing about love,
And that I do not love you! Did I not say
There was a frenzy in the light of the stars
All through the livelong night, and that the night
Was full of marriages? But that fight's over,
And all that's done with, and I have to die.

FEDELM.

[*Throwing her arms about him.*]

I will not be put from you, although I think
I had not grudged it you if some great lady,
If the King's daughter, had set out your bed.
I will not give you up to death; no, no!
And are not these white arms and this soft neck
Better than the brown earth?

SEANCHAN.

[*Struggling to disengage himself.*]

Begone from me!
There's treachery in those arms and in that voice.
They're all against me. Why do you linger there?
How long must I endure the sight of you?

FEDELM.

O, Seanchan! Seanchan!

SEANCHAN.

[*Rising.*]

Go where you will,
So it be out of sight and out of mind.
I cast you from me like an old torn cap,
A broken shoe, a glove without a finger,
A crooked penny; whatever is most worthless.

FEDELM.

[*Bursts into tears.*]

O, do not drive me from you!

SEANCHAN.

[*Takes her in his arms.*]

What did I say,
My dove of the woods? I was about to curse you.
It was a frenzy. I'll unsay it all.
But you must go away.

FEDELM.

Let me be near you.
I will obey like any married wife.
Let me but lie before your feet.

SEANCHAN.

Come nearer.

[*Kisses her.*

If I had eaten when you bid me, sweetheart,
The kiss of multitudes in times to come
Had been the poorer.

[*Enter* KING *from palace, followed by the two* PRINCESSES.

KING.

[*To* FEDELM.]

Has he eaten yet?

FEDELM.

No, King, and will not till you have restored
The right of the poets.

KING.

[*Coming down and standing before* SEANCHAN.]

Seanchan, you have refused
Everybody that I have sent, and now
I come to you myself; and I have come
To bid you put your pride as far away
As I have put my pride. I had your love
Not a great while ago, and now you have planned
To put a voice by every cottage fire,
And in the night when no one sees who cries,
To cry against me till my throne has crumbled.
And yet if I give way I must offend
My courtiers and nobles till they, too,
Strike at the crown. What would you have of me?

SEANCHAN.

When did the poets promise safety, King?

KING.

Seanchan, I bring you bread in my own hands,
And bid you eat because of all these reasons,
And for this further reason, that I love you.

[SEANCHAN *pushes bread away, with* FEDELM'S *hand.*

You have refused it, Seanchan?

SEANCHAN.

We have refused it.

KING.

I have been patient, though I am a king,
And have the means to force you. But that's ended,
And I am but a king, and you a subject.
Nobles and courtiers, bring the poets hither;

[*Enter* COURT LADIES, MONK, SOLDIER, CHAMBERLAIN, *and* COURTIERS *with* PUPILS, *who have halters round their necks.*

For you can have your way. I that was man,
With a man's heart, am now all king again,
Remembering that the seed I come of, though
A hundred kings have sown it and resown it,
Has neither trembled nor shrunk backward yet
Because of the hard business of a king.
Speak to your master; beg your life of him;
Show him the halter that is round your necks.
If his heart's set upon it, he may die;
But you shall all die with him. [*Goes up steps.*
Beg your lives!
Begin, for you have little time to lose.
Begin it, you that are the oldest pupil.

OLDEST PUPIL.

Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right of the poets.

KING.

Silence! you are as crazy as your master.
But that young boy, that seems the youngest of you,
I'd have him speak. Kneel down before him, boy;
Hold up your hands to him, that you may pluck
That milky-coloured neck out of the noose.

YOUNGEST PUPIL.

Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right of the poets.

OLDEST PUPIL.

Gather the halters up into your hands
And drive us where you will, for in all things,
But in our Art, we are obedient.

[*They hold the ends of the halter towards the* KING. *The* KING *comes slowly down steps.*

KING.

Kneel down, kneel down; he has the greater power.
There is no power but has its root in his—
I understand it now. There is no power
But his that can withhold the crown or give it,
Or make it reverent in the eyes of men,
And therefore I have laid it in his hands,
And I will do his will.

[*He has put the crown into* SEANCHAN'S *hands.*

SEANCHAN.

[*Who has been assisted to rise by his pupils.*]

O crown! O crown!
It is but right the hands that made the crown
In the old time should give it where they please.

[*He places the crown on the* KING'S *head.*

O silver trumpets! Be you lifted up,
And cry to the great race that is to come.

Long-throated swans, amid the waves of Time,
Sing loudly, for beyond the wall of the world
It waits, and it may hear and come to us!

[*The* PUPILS *blow a trumpet blast.*

NOTES

NOTES

THE SHADOWY WATERS

THE first version of "The Shadowy Waters" was first performed on 14 January, 1904, in the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, by the Irish National Theatre Society, and with the following players in the principal parts: Forgael, F. Fay; Aibric, Shamus O'Sullivan; Dectora, Maire MacShiubhlaigh. Its production was an accident, for in the first instance I had given it to the company that they might have something for practice in the speaking of my sort of blank verse till I had a better play finished. It played badly enough, but a little better than I had feared; and as I had been in America, when it was first played, I got it played again privately, and gave it to Miss Farr for a theosophical convention, that I might discover how to set it to rights as a stage play. I hope I have set it to rights now, and that if it finds an audience familiar with the longing of a lover for impossible things, and longings that are like his, it will hold the attention and have

some pleasure in it for the players. I have not yet seen this new version played, but have rehearsed it, and Mr. Robert Gregory has designed the boat and sail. The colours of all will be as at the first performance, dark blue and dark green, but for Dectora a lighter green against the darker tints in sky and boat, with some glimmer of copper here and there, and the lighting a not very bright moonlight. The effect of this monotony of colour was to my eyes beautiful, and made the players seem like people in a dream. I have described these colours a little in the stage directions, not because I think of them as a necessary part of the play, but because it is necessary for some remote and decorative picture of the action, to float up into the mind's eye of the reader, who must imagine some sort of a stage scenery. When we began to get together the properties in this new version, the stage carpenter found it very difficult to make the crescent-shaped harp that was to burn with fire; and besides, no matter how well he made the frame, there was no way of making the strings take fire. I had, therefore, to give up the harp for a sort of psaltery, a little like the psaltery Miss Farr speaks to, where the strings could be slits covered with glass or gelatine on the surface of a shallow and perhaps semi-transparent box; and besides, it amused one to picture, in the centre of a myth, the instrument of our new art. This necessitated changing the lines where the word "harp" occurred as follows:—

Instead of the lines

"Were't not
That there is magic in that harp of his,"

read

"Were't not
That there is magic, or a Druid life
Hidden in that stringed instrument of his."

And instead of the lines from

"He has caught the crescent moon,"

down to

"if we strike,"

read

"He has called a creeping fire out of the moon
And carries it between us.

SECOND SAILOR.

A moony fire
Is crawling in the flame that it may leap
Into our bones and burn them to the marrow."

And instead of the line

"It was that harper put it in my thoughts,"

read

"It was that plucker of the strings that made me."

And in the last speech, instead of the line

"And that old harp awakens of itself,"

read

"And now the strings awaken of themselves."

There is no reason for objecting to a mechanical effect when it represents some material thing, becomes a symbol,

a player, as it were. One permits it in obedience to the same impulse that has made religious men decorate with jewels and embroidery the robes of priests and hierophants, even until the robe, stiffened and weighted, seems more important than the man who carries it. He has become a symbol, and his robe has become a symbol of something incapable of direct expression, something that is superhuman. If the harp cannot suggest some power that no actor could represent by sheer acting, for the more acting the more human life, the enchanting of so many people by it will seem impossible. Perhaps very wonderful music might do that if the audience were musicians, but lacking the music and that audience it is better to appeal to the eye. The play will, I hope, be acted as on its first production, with a quiet gravity and a kind of rhythmic movement, and a very scrupulous cherishing of the music of the verse. The "O O O" of the lamentation will be sung as Miss Farr sings the "Ochones" in her recitation of "The Lament of Emer."

ON BAILE'S STRAND

THE first version of this play was performed on 27 December, 1904, at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, by the Irish National Theatre Society, and with the following cast: Cuchulain, Frank Fay; Conchubar, George Roberts; Daire (an old King, not now in the play), G. Macdonald; the Blind Man, Shamus O'Sullivan; the Fool, William Fay; the Young Man, P. MacShiubhlaigh. The old and young Kings were played by the following: R. Nash, N. Power, U. Wright, E. Kegan, Emma Vernon, Doreen Gunning, Sara Allgood.

It was revived by the National Theatre Society, Ltd., in a somewhat altered version at Oxford, Cambridge, and London a few months later. I then entirely rewrote it up to the entrance of the Young Man, and changed it a good deal from that on to the end, and this new version was played at the Abbey Theatre in April, 1906. It is now as right as I can make it with my present experience, but it must always be a little over-complicated when played by itself. It is one of a cycle of plays dealing with Cuchulain, with his friends and enemies. One of these plays will have Aoife as its central character, and the principal

motive of another will be the power of the witches over Cuchulain's life. The present play is a kind of cross-road where too many interests meet and jostle for the hearer to take them in at a first hearing unless he listen carefully, or know something of the story of the other plays of the cycle. Mr. Herbert Hughes has written the music for the Fool's song in the opening dialogue, and another friend a little tune for the three women. These songs, like all other songs in our plays, are sung so as to preserve as far as possible the intonation and speed of ordinary passionate speech, for nothing can justify the degradation of an element of life even in the service of an art. Very little of the words of the song of the three women can be heard, for they must be for the most part a mere murmur under the voices of the men. It seemed right to take some trouble over them, just as it is right to finish off the statue where it is turned to the wall, and besides there is always the reader and one's own pleasure.

THE KING'S THRESHOLD

"THE King's Threshold" was first played 7 October, 1903, in the Molesworth Hall by the Irish National Theatre Society, and with the following cast: Seanchan, F. Fay; King Guaire, P. Kelly; the Lord High Chamberlain, Shamus O'Sullivan; Soldier, W. Conroy; Monk, S. Sheridan-Neill; Mayor, W. Fay; a Cripple, P. Columb; a Court Lady, Honor Saville; another Court Lady, Dora Melville; a Princess, Sara Allgood; another Princess, Dora Gunning; Fedelm, Maire MacShiubhlaigh; a Servant, P. MacShiubhlaigh; another Servant, P. Josephs; a Pupil, G. Roberts; another Pupil, Cartia McChormac.

It has been revised a good many times since then, and although the play has not been changed in the radical structure, the parts of the Mayor, Servant, and Cripples are altogether new, and the rest is altered here and there. It was written when our Society was having a hard fight for the recognition of pure art in a community of which one half was buried in the practical affairs of life, and the other half in politics and a propagandist patriotism. I took the plot of it from a Middle Irish story about the demands of the poets at the court of King Guaire, but

twisted it about and revised its moral that the poet might have the best of it. One of my fellow-playwrights is going, I have hope, to take the other side and make a play that can be played after it, as in Greece the farce followed the tragedy.

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